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April 13, 2025, Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Luke 19:28-41

Faith In the Wilderness: Facing Consequences

What a glorious entry we have made, waving palms and singing! A Palm Sunday tradition not only here but in churches in many Christian traditions.

As you will hear in our Gospel this morning - or rather not hear - Luke never mentions palms - he only mentions cloaks being spread on the road. In fact, only John specifies that the branches laid down were from palm trees. In Matthew and Mark, cloaks are spread with branches or leafy branches cut from the field. Whatever the particular details of each gospel, the intent is the same. Spreading cloaks and branches on the road was like rolling out the red carpet - signifying that Jesus was a person to be honored.

I invite you to participate in the reading by waving your palms and praising God with a loud voice alongside the voices of the disciples who have gone before us - using the words of the scripture printed in your bulletin. I will raise my arm in invitation when the time comes.

Hear now these words from the Gospel of Luke 19:28-41 in the Common English Bible Translation:

After Jesus said this, he continued on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. He said, "Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said.

As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "Its master needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.

As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said,

**"Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens."**

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!"

He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."

As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it.

The word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God

I love the way the book of belonging tells this story - it really makes me feel like I am there - with the dust churning around and all of the people gathered. I wonder what kind of parade we would give today? Floats of flowers, lots of balloons, signs painted on cardboard that read "Welcome Jesus", a parade of cars, bands and bells playing and choirs singing? Where would the parade lead?

The journey from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem takes a little more than an hour to walk and is pretty steep down hill at the onset. Luke tells us that the crowd is made up of Jesus' disciples - those who have been gathering to hear him and follow him, maybe some have been with him since the start of his ministry three years ago, and maybe some are new.

They were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover - the Jewish festival of remembrance of what God had done for the people in the past, saving them from

slavery in Egypt and reminding them to work for the freedom and protection of all people as taught in the Hebrew Bible.¹

The spirit of the crowd matches the spirit of passover as Luke tells us the followers are praising God because of all the mighty things they had seen. These “mighty things” include

- casting out demons, healing the sick,
- calling fishermen, eating with tax collectors and sinners,
- raising a widow’s son, giving sight to the blind,
- allowing a woman to anoint his feet and teaching those gathered that she is to be seen and acknowledged.
- Jesus tells parables about what the kingdom of God is like, teaches about loving enemies and not judging others
- He calms the sea,
- heals more people – oh, and not of every day illnesses, but of illness that put them on the margins of society
- He feeds 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes and leftovers!
- He tells them to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind – AND to love your neighbor as yourself –* and goes on to teach who neighbors are through stories like the Good Samaritan
- He teaches how to pray, confronts the notions of who is important by telling dinner stories,
- He also forgives people their sins, something only God could do
- And he also challenges the way the Jewish laws were followed by healing and feeding on the sabbath,
- And he heals more people and forgives more people and teaches about what God’s kingdom really looks like – a kingdom of justice and forgiveness and love

No wonder they were shouting with loud voices! Those who followed Jesus celebrated all of these stories – those they witnessed and those they heard about. Jesus was at the center of people who had been cast out, ignored, left for dead – and they were seen and heard and loved because of him. He was also surrounded

¹ <https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover/passover-history>, <https://pjcc.org/jewish-life/jewish-holidays-explained/passover/>

by those who supported his teachings and healings and feedings, tired of the way things were - difficult and oppressive under the rule of the Roman Empire. Hopeful that things would change, that Jesus was the one they longed for to free them. I wonder if they were remembering the stories and making parallels to their ancestors freed from slavery.

I wonder, in this moment, if the crowd has forgotten that Jesus has also told them that following him requires sacrifice - that the path of faith in God is not the path of worldly power but is the path of humility and love.

I wonder, in this moment, if they recognize that his entry into the city is the opposite of the way that one who has power usually enters - with a big horse and great fanfare and armies. I wonder if they recognize his humility. I wonder how they will reflect back on the day in the coming months and years.

The Pharisees, it seems, are uncomfortable with all this fanfare, as they tell Jesus to make them be quiet. I wonder what they are thinking. Maybe some of them aren't fans of Jesus and are actively trying to stop him. Maybe some of them think the people are being too rowdy and drawing too much attention and the pharisees fear that they will be in trouble. Maybe some of them have listened to and asked questions of Jesus and know what is coming - that he is going to die.

Whatever their reason, Jesus refuses and tells them the stones will shout if the people stop - harkening back perhaps to Jesus' presence from the beginning and his connection to all of creation. What power that simple phrase holds.

What power too, is held in Jesus weeping. The greek word used here is not the kind of weeping that is done with tears sliding quietly down the cheek. It is weeping aloud - a kind of weeping that cannot be ignored. I wonder if you know that kind of wailing, One born out of sadness that the world is not as it should be, could be.

In the midst of the parade, Jesus knows what is coming. Jesus knows that his time is nearing the end. He knows the temple will be destroyed. He knows that all that he has done to care for God's people and demonstrate what God's love really looks like has been a threat to those in power, and he knows that he will face the consequences. He will demonstrate what real power looks like by enduring the

shame and death of the cross. He will not use his power for harm or to shut down those who don't agree with him. Through his ministry he has proven time and again that his power is from God, and that power is love - a healing, forgiving, welcoming of stranger, outcast and sinner kind of love. The power of God is not one of destruction, but one of grace, of mercy, of compassion and healing. He has demonstrated and called us to tap into this love, to live into this power, a power that opposes the machine that seeks to raise itself at the expense of others.

Jesus does not command us to insist on our own way but calls us to love God and each other the way that he taught. He proves that this is the way to God's kingdom, and is his superpower by taking it all the way to the cross.

Paul tells the church in Philippi:

"Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus could have exploited his equality with God and risen to political and financial power. Instead, he lives an authentic life, one that is humbly wrapped in human flesh and born in a manger, one that and eats with sinners and disciples and outcasts, one that welcomes even those who would betray him to the table to share in a last meal and remember that his body and blood are shed for everyone. And in response to that powerful love shed for us, we are to be obedient to God, to follow the example Christ has set before us, to stand up to the powers who rule by might and fear so that all may live in peace.

As we enter this Holy Week may we lean into the hard stories of Jesus last days, to remember the example he gave to us, in his life, and in his dying, to remain obedient to God, to remember all that God has done for God's people throughout time, even now, and will forever. May the stories of Jesus' last days give us courage to shout

"Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord" and to live into his teachings, even on the hardest days, knowing that resurrection is coming.

Amen.