

Luke 19: 28-40 *After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"* 32 *So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord needs it." 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."*

GOSPEL READING: Luke 22:7-23:46 (portions)

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⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus^[a] sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." ⁹ They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" ¹⁰ "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." ¹³ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial."^[a] ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." ^{[43} Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴ In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]]

⁴⁵ When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."^[u] ⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" ...⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at

him and said, "This man also was with him."⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."⁵⁸ A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"⁵⁹ Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean."⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him;⁶⁴ they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"⁶⁵ They kept heaping many other insults on him.⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council.⁶⁷ They said, "If you are the Messiah,^[a] tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe;⁶⁸ and if I question you, you will not answer.⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God."⁷⁰ All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am."...

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."³ Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so."²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"²² A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him."²³ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed.²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.

³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus^[a] there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."^[a] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS....⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

“Our Story”

You know, many of us were not raised to give a lot of attention to the happenings of Holy Week, not even to the Last Supper nor the events of Good Friday. My recollection is that we moved from palms to lilies, from the “hosannas” of Palm Sunday directly to the “hallelujahs” of Easter morning. Concern grew in the 1980’s and 90’s that there was becoming a distaste for the events of Holy Week, for what Dr Peter Gomes says, was a feeling for “*the embarrassment and indignity of the cross.*”¹ This concern became a significant one, so much so that a movement began in the Roman Catholic Church to rename Palm Sunday officially to Palm/PASSION Sunday.

It has now become a tradition in many churches to read the entirety or near entirety of the Passion narrative, as we did today, and to provide mid-week services for congregants to attend. However, there’s another reason to avoid moving from palms to lilies but instead from palms to passion. And that is, that when we do, we are given a chance to enter into the story, the story that is actually ours. We are given a chance to enter in and claim our part of the full, the grand story and live it.²

The people of that first Palm Sunday did. The people made a claim that Jesus, the One for whom they threw their cloaks down was THEIR messiah. “*Hosanna! (Save, Now) Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!*,” they sang. They danced and sang and waved palm branches before him. They prepared a path for him. It seems they finally understood. Jesus WAS God’s Anointed, whom they’d been waiting for all these years. He’d spent the last 3 years offering peace and healing to them, the weary, the poor, and spiritually hungry. He’d eaten with sinners and welcomed the outcast. He’d forgiven enemies, turned over the money changers’ tables, elevated the status of women and children, and interpreted the Law contrary to the teachings of the corrupted religious leaders. He would, the people thought, save them from their oppression under Rome. He

¹ Peter Gomes. Quoted in John Buchanan, “*To Stir a City*” <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2005/032005.html> (accessed 4/7/17).

² Ana Tew. “*Protesters. Palm Sunday.*” <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/protesters-palm-sunday-c-2019>. (accessed 4-3-20).

would save them from the fear would creep into their dreams at night, and through him, they were already imagining a different world for their children, one that would bring for them the freedom that the liturgy of their Passover promised.³ *“They praised God joyfully with a loud voice,”* Luke writes, *“for all the deeds of power that they had seen.”* Ted Wardlaw notes, *“They sensed that day, that great day, somewhere in their guts, that nothing was more appropriate or timely than their praise!”*⁴ *“Hosanna”*, they sang. Indeed, if they’d kept quiet, the stones would’ve cried out instead.

The people put their claim on Jesus in the face of what was happening in the opposite side of the city. While Jesus rode in on a humble donkey, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, was processing in, moving his headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem, doing as he did each year during the Jewish Passover. Extra military units were with him. It was a procession with much horrible pomp and circumstance, intended not to cause celebration but terror. It was intended to send a message to the emotionally-charged throng of Jewish pilgrims in the city that any uprising they might have in mind during their Passover, the time they remembered being liberated from slavery centuries earlier, would be put down. The people waving palms though paid no mind. They nevertheless clamored forward to praise, to protest their oppression, to shout, to celebrate Jesus. They risked their lives in declaring there was no ruler, no Caesar, no economic philosophy or political party above Christ. Only Jesus deserved their loyalty.

Of course, their loyalty did not last. As the story goes, some of those who celebrated Jesus with shouts of *“Hosanna”* were among those who soon were shouting *“Crucify him”*. They were quick to give him over for continued peace with Rome. And then there were others who were already beginning to transform into betrayers, deniers, and deserters, losing faith that he was not the military leader who would take on their Roman oppressors. I appreciate how Rev. Anna Tew puts it, *“We humans are such fragile creatures, and we often*

³Shannon J. Kershner. *“We Were There: The Crowd”*. www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/032915.html (accessed 4-12-19).

⁴Theodore Wardlaw. *“The Stewardship of Praise”*. Day1.r/832-the_stewardship_of_praise. (accessed 4-12-2019).

get it right just before messing it all up again."⁵

But this is actually the central point of the story, isn't it? It is into this mess that Jesus inserted himself. He came into the messiness which IS the human condition. Jesus CAME to take on our lot in ways that no-one waving their palm branches expected, nor can we, really. *"No, as the events of that week made obvious, he came to save all, everyone who shares his flesh: No one is outside of his salvific reach, no one too different, or too far away, or too low, too lost, too sinful, too anything. He revealed his plan to save us through his suffering, not his splendor; through his vulnerability, not his might; through his willingness and determination to never waver being who God had called him to be---God with us, God for us--- even though that led him straight to his betrayal, gut-wrenching trial, his brutal mocking and torture, and his sacrificial death.... on a Roman cross."*⁷

Yes, his death on a cross....that's the part of the story that if missed, the rest cannot be understood. If you go from palms to lilies, if you do not linger at the cross a while then you cannot comprehend, as Paul Harvey used to say, "the rest of the story". You cannot know that "the God who rose is the God who died".⁶ You cannot know what "God with us," "God for us" really means. You cannot know that God in Jesus has suffered rejection, betrayal, abandonment, torture and death. He's gone to the utter depths of hell for a purpose...and that is so that that there is no where we can be that he has not been and more, so that he understands our tears, and so that we can "cast all our cares upon him". As Jurgen Moltmann says, *"Jesus weeps with us so that we may one day laugh with him."*⁷

It reminds me of a simple story of a child who had a stomach ache and was unable to sleep because of it. Her mother went into her bedroom and pulled her up into her lap. She stroked her belly and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. And all became well for the girl. Did the rubbing of the belly and the kiss really make it well? No. It was the time in her

⁵ Ana Tew. "Protesters. Palm Sunday." <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/protesters-palm-sunday-c-2019>. (accessed 4-3-20).

⁶ Cyndy Rigby. "God, Faith & the Coronavirus". https://vimeo.com/402439420?fbclid=IwAR3dtIhxzAq_5LmlAzsJSSINz7dM_hFidhbrKHByBy-STOHbpDOQ6oEaqMW4. (accessed 4-3-20).

⁷ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/230460-god-weeps-with-us-so-that-we-may-one-day> (accessed 4/3/20).

*arms, curled up in her lap, seeing her mother cry, and when asked, hearing her mother's answer, "I am crying because when you hurt, I hurt." That did more for the child than all the medicine in the world.*⁸

Yes, you cannot know. You cannot know the full story if you do not linger at the cross, and it is a full and wonderful story, friends. It's our story. Just as it was for those ones who claimed their donkey riding Savior so long, it is ours. And every year the Church tells it again so that we can find ourselves in it. We are the ones who boldly, sometimes courageously, claim our highest loyalty to Christ alone. We laugh and share a meal with him and those he loves. We learn to wash each other's feet. We promise to "*love as we have been loved*". But then, we also "*get it right just before we go and mess up again,*". We become afraid. We betray. We deny. And we, like the early followers, see the vulnerable redeeming love and the horrible cost that the cross which we put him on, reveals.

It is our story, all of it. All of it (*pause*) ...and that blessedly includes the part that comes after Good Friday, the part that takes place in the Garden at the empty tomb. It may seem like the ending of the story, but oh, it is actually a beginning, a new beginning. We are part of that story too and we can claim it. We can begin a forgiven new life because Jesus has broken the bonds of death opened the gates of eternal life for us. Us. What belongs to Jesus belongs to us! Next Sunday, brothers and sisters, we will gather together again and we will sing, "*Hallelujah*" and cry of "*He is risen...He is risen indeed.*" But today, we enter into the story once again. WE step into Holy Week, walking each day with our Lord. And as we enter, we need wave our palms and claim, "*Hosanna..Save now,*" "*Blessed is He, who comes in the name of the Lord*". Amen.

⁸Craddock. "*Cherry Log Sermons: Why the Cross*" Quoted in John Buchanan. <https://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2005/032005.html> (accessed 4-3-20).