



Sermon

Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025

Luke 19:28-40; Luke 22:14-23:56

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It is powerful to hear this powerful story¹ in so many of our voices, bidding us to consider, “Where are we in these scenes? Where are we as the action unfolds?”

Are we like the women who have been at Jesus’ side for so long, watching, speechless, from a distance? Are we, from our own insecurities and desperation for clarity and certainty, among those hurling accusations? Do we hunger for justice? Does justice appear? Does it appear how we expect? Do we lend a helping hand along the way? Who do we help? Do we cause harm in word or action, and against whom? Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday, bids us to consider where we are as these scenes unfold, not only two thousand years ago, but how they feel so familiar to us today. Where are we, now?

Palm Sunday is also overwhelming in its cascade of emotions, one after another. I wish it allowed us more time to feel the fullness of joy before the crashes of violence and the silence of grief. In the joy and expectation as Jesus entered Jerusalem, we cry, “Hosanna!” which means, “Save us! Save us now!” As they watched Jesus ride into Jerusalem from the east on a donkey, they cried out him to “save, save us now!” Were they sincere in those cries? Were they mocking as they cried, “Save us!”

There was also another ride into Jerusalem happening from the west: Pilate entering on a horse, the one who looks like power and justice. What does justice look like? Does it appear as expected?

As we think about what preceded this day, how Jesus spent his time, what his own actions and words were, did they look or sound as expected? Did they suspend belief? His life and ministry, which we now name as the Gospel - the good news - did not look so uniformly good at that time. How many expectations he crashed: the justice that he lived and brought was not, in contrast to the powers that be, one that ever promised security or certainty, protection or expectation.²

¹ Of the Passion, Luke 22:14-23:56, which had just been read by a small group of lectors

² Inspired by Kathy Escobar, *Turning Over Tables: A Lenten Call for Disrupting Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2025)

Consider how he spent his time: “gathering,” as one author puts it, “the most unqualified and unprofessional group of leaders, touching lepers” who no one else would touch, “eating with those who were outcast” who no one else would spend time with much less eat with.³ Consider how he spent his time: “shaking down religious systems” instead of cozying up to them, “modeling” in every word and action, “inclusion”, inclusion, inclusion, rather than exclusion, “promoting” and living “relationship”, rather than “force”.⁴ His justice, his love, his leadership, his power ... does it look like what’s expected?

Amid contrasting expectations and desires, in a confluence of emotion, one after another, what do we say? What do we do? With what power do we align? For what justice do we hunger? These powers and dynamics are of course very familiar to us. We hope that they would have resolved over the past two thousand years, and here we are in a very similar scene. Do we watch it unfold? Do we speak, and what do we say? And as these dynamics continue all around us, more than we could imagine and more than expect, how are we? How is our heart?

The poem Malcolm Guite, who writes poems for every day and season of the year, whose poetry we will hear again soon and we have heard recently, writes a poem called “Palm Sunday” naming the cascade and confluence of emotions and focusing in on, How are we, Who are we, How is our heart? He writes,

*Now to the gate of my Jerusalem,
The seething holy city of my heart,
The saviour comes. But will I welcome him?
Oh crowds of easy feelings make a start;
They raise their hands, get caught up in the singing,
And think the battle won. Too soon they'll find
The challenge, the reversal he is bringing
Changes their tune. I know what lies behind
The surface flourish that so quickly fades;
Self-interest, and fearful guardedness,
The hardness of the heart, its barricades,
And at the core, the dreadful emptiness
Of a perverted temple. Jesus come
Break my resistance and make me your home.⁵*

Save us, save us now.

Amen.

³ Escobar, *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Malcolm Guite, “Palm Sunday” in *Sounding the Seasons: 70 Sonnets for the Christian Year*, accessed at <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2013/03/24/a-sonnet-for-palm-sunday/> and used with permission