

4.10.2022 Palm Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Luke 19:28-40, Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 23:1-49

“We cannot remain silent”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Today, with Christians around the world, we begin the journey of Holy Week. Holy Week describes the center of the Christian faith: our belief in God’s work in Jesus who died for each person, and our response of faith active in loving service to our neighbor. Holy Week reveals the messianic event of Jesus Christ, his cross and his resurrection.

In the Palm Sunday gospel, Jesus enters Jerusalem, riding not a warhorse; but rather, riding on a donkey, an animal used for humble and peaceful work. Jesus’ choice of riding a donkey immediately tells us something crucially important about the incarnate identity of God: Jesus enters Jerusalem not as a political king to wage war, but as a servant king who offers reconciliation, peace, and hope to a world in need.

In today’s reading from Philippians, Paul make it clear that Jesus Christ is the God who emptied himself of his divine rank and authority to assume the form of a servant for all people. This tells us something very important about God: God is strong enough to become weak, and God is great enough to become humble. In Christ Jesus, God is not a God of war, but of peace; Christ is not an arrogant or proud leader, but a humble servant king who lives to lift up a fallen and sinful humanity. Our world is in need of leaders who share the same mind as Christ, serving their people with humility, even to the point of giving their lives and their lifetimes for their people. Jesus’ journey to his cross demonstrates his willingness to die so that others might live. During Holy Week we see once again the identity of God.

In the Passion Story of Holy Week, we also once again see our own human identity and our need of a Savior. The crowds, like us today, meet Jesus with shouts of joy, saying, “*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*” Yet by Friday, the same crowds will turn on Jesus, shouting, “*Crucify, crucify him!*” Holy Week reveals the fickleness of human beings, who talk a great game with words of praise. Yet when they are needed to step up and support Jesus, they instead cast their partisan lot for a murderer, Barabbas.

Even the justice system failed to give a just verdict. Pilate heard the case and though he could find no guilt in Jesus, Pilate yielded to the crowd’s desire, setting free a murderer and condemning an innocent man. Jesus’ own disciples fared no better and were afraid to defend their Lord and teacher.

One betrayed him; one openly denied him, and all left him to be killed. The story of Holy Week reveals our broken human identity as a world, as individuals, and as a society that is often deeply flawed.

The only person in Luke's Gospel who speaks truth about Jesus and asks for his help, is one of the two men who was crucified with Jesus. This man said to the other, "*Do you not fear God, since you are also under that same sentence of condemnation? We indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.*" Only the sinful convicted man speaks the truth; only he sees Jesus for who Jesus really is. The criminal said to Jesus from the cross, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" This man saw Jesus as a king, and this man saw his cross as the way to God's kingdom.

The irony of the Passion Story is that the political and religious leaders, the disciples and the crowd were all complicit in a miscarriage of justice. Only the criminal, who recognized his own sinfulness, spoke truth about Jesus, and sought mercy from him.

If you had been present during this first Holy Week, would you have shouted "*Hosanna*"? Would you have later shouted, "*Crucify him*"? The Passion Story reminds us that many people love the kingdom of Jesus, but few will carry his cross. Many wish to share his breaking of the bread, but few wish to share his cup of suffering for others. This week, I encourage you, once more, to prayerful meditation upon a Savior who calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, so that we might be raised with him in Paradise.

The Passion Story continues to speak to our world today for everywhere we see people who call themselves Christians, yet remain silent in their neighbor's hour of need. Clearly the world does not share the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Rather than serving others, many expect to be served; rather than emptying themselves of power to become servants of others, many continue to exploit their power over others.

The drama of Holy Week reveals a suffering servant king and the arrogance and weakness of humanity. The world has not changed; more than ever, we need the humility to be of the same mind as Christ Jesus, emptying and giving of ourselves for others.

We might be forgiven for not knowing better, for ignorance of our true human condition, yet we have suffered two World Wars in the last century and countless others. We have seen the injustice of rulers who come riding with drums of war rather than hosannas of peace. Our world is weary and tired after two years of a pandemic that has killed over 6 million people globally and nearly 1 million in

this nation alone. Now, our world teeters on the edge of war and chaos, because one nation's fickle songs of hosanna and empty words of praise for their "sisters and brothers" in Ukraine have been quickly changed into words of war, words of "crucify them." The human drama of Holy Week is still with us as we see humanity continuing the tragedy of killing the innocent and the weak, and of misusing and perverting justice, instead of living to serve Christ in their neighbors.

This year, during Holy Week, we are challenged, in Paul's words, "*to be of the same mind as Christ*" by emptying ourselves to become servants for a world in need. To be of the same mind as Christ means serving alongside of Christ. To be of the same mind as Christ means using our power and authority to help the weak – for if we are strong, then we must help the weak.

We cannot remain silent. If we cry out, "*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom,*" then we must also humbly carry Jesus' cross, emptying ourselves for others. Only in seeing Jesus and his cross as the way to his kingdom, will we also gain Paradise.

This year, amidst global anxiety and chaos, we again begin Holy Week. As the Pharisees sought to silence Jesus' disciples, Jesus said, "*I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.*" The Christian faith is not a religion of spiritual silence, but of "*faith active in love.*" Christians walk the way of the cross by praising God and serving their neighbor.

We cannot remain silent. Be of the same mind as Christ, who reconciled the world to God by emptying himself in loving service to others.

This week and every week: be the voices and hands of Christ's love for this world. Amen.