

Palm Sunday 2020
Year A
Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21: 1-11

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St. Peter's Glenside
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The Liberating Love of Jesus

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Good morning. Welcome to all our St. Peter's family, and many others of you who are now part of a larger, and extended family. I am glad you're here.

Although it doesn't quite seem like two thousand years ago, there was a time when "flattening the curve" would have reminded us more of weight loss and getting in shape than saving our lives.

This year is different. The stakes are high as we carry crosses we never expected to carry, bear burdens we never expected to bear as we walk toward the cross with Jesus, this Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week.

This year is different. I'm thinking of the loneliness of Jesus. The excruciating pain of saying goodbye to his friends, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead and stunk of the tomb; the miracle that probably sealed his fate as word spread.

I'm thinking of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with her hair and perfume, as John tells it, how erotic that was and understanding why Jesus didn't stop it. He knew he would never be touched by love again. What agony as he bid the friends he loved so dearly goodbye and the crushing loneliness that descended upon him.

Jesus set out for Jerusalem, which he knew too well, slays its prophets. He knew he was a dead man walking, well, riding on that donkey he sent his disciples to get. How lonely could that be?

Yet we sing, triumphantly,

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, your triumphs now begin
o'er captive death and conquered sin.

Easy for us to say, right? The hymn skips over the horror and gets right to the triumph yet to come. Hard to find a melody for torture and assassination.

What was Jesus thinking as the cheering crowds roared throwing through their cloaks on the road and waving branches as passed by? They weren't paying much attention to the donkey. They wanted another kind of king. A happily-ever-after-kind of king which Jesus never proclaimed to be.

Palm Sunday is the ultimate paradox. First the parade, and shouts of "hosanna" which translates as "Save us."

And then-- the Passion narrative and the horror to come. "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The crowd that shouts "Hail him!" days later screams "Nail him!" as Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz Weber so succinctly puts it.

Could anything be lonelier to bear?

He is proclaimed Lord and King today, only to be made King of Fools, clothed in rags mocking royalty, crowned with thorns as he is led away to crucifixion by the end of this week, writes the Rev. Canon Ted Karpf.

The poet Maya Angelou talked about two kinds of loneliness; the loneliness that can be rocked, and the loneliness that roams. Jesus knew that inconsolable loneliness. Yes, even knowing that he was the son of God. There was no immunity.

"Take this cup" Jesus says the night before he dies, asking if there is any way out. It's as intimate a moment as we heard last week with the words, "Jesus wept," as he did at the tomb of Lazarus, overcome in grief with Mary and Martha at the

death of their brother. In raising him from the dead, Jesus gave his life for his friend with a miracle that no doubt helped seal his fate.

A prophet raising the dead would surely be a threat to the Roman Emperor who proclaimed himself as king and son of God.

Jesus and his rag tag parade of peasant followers marched to Jerusalem, proclaiming God's kingdom of justice and peace. Pontius Pilate paraded into Jerusalem, too, for Passover, from the coastal city of Caesarea where he lived in the beautiful seaside town, much more glamorous than Jerusalem. Pilate's parade was one of imperial pomp: Soldiers, weapons, cavalry, and armor; a military parade.

A priest, friend, and mentor to me, The Rev. Canon Ted Karpf, whom I quoted earlier, will be celebrating Evening Prayer this week with us on Tuesday, and wrote in a Palm Sunday sermon, that Jesus was in on a secret:

He alone, knows a holy and terrifying secret. Faith is *not* about listening to the mob, but about listening to God. He rides on in majesty, knowing that goodness can be defeated in this life; righteousness and kindness can be abused, and even trampled, and hope can be lost. He knows that loneliness and sorrow can annihilate life and that even the 'good' can die young. He knows all of this and more.

And while powerful, it is also a lonely realization to understand, let alone live.

Karpf continues:

His passion and purpose is obedience; obedience to God and to the deepest truth in his soul. By his self-offering, he unmask's our self-deception; reveals our callousness; shatters our romantic optimism and exposes our faithlessness. He passionately holds on to a quiet, but severe hope—as that which cannot be seen—but only kindled in the eternity of God's power to raise up something New...Out of the ashes of death.

We are living in a cancelled world, traversing a landscape without gravity. But all new life begins in the womb darkness where it is impossible to see what is to come. It is a lonely place, indeed.

But the truth of our faith is that we are not there alone. Jesus is right there with us, persisting in loving us, even when we scream to crucify him. It is a liberating love, offered to resurrect us every day of our lives.

May we all, in this Holy Week, open our hearts to be first responders to Christ's love.

AMEN