

LITURGY OF THE PALM & LITURGY OF THE PASSION
 Luke 19: 28-40 and Luke 23: 1-49

INTRO TO THE GOSPEL READING:

Even as we wave our palm branches, we do not pretend that we are re-enacting a historical event. We are not making the experience of Jesus' final week happen again. We remember last year's procession with palms, see it again this year, and know it will come around again next year.

We remember the heart of our faith that comes to us all at once in the past, present, and future. We call to mind these past events in Jesus' life, so that we can sense their significance for our present lives and for the future God is preparing for all creation.

The story you are about to hear may be familiar to you. We have heard it told my Matthew and Mark before. This year, we listen to the unfolding of Jesus' last week, as Luke, a master story-teller, tells it.

And Luke was writing to the people living in the second half of the first century, living under the rule of the Roman empire. And so, there are some things that were obvious to Luke's original readers, or at least they were culturally familiar, that we are not, that make difference in what we hear in this story. For example, "entrance processions were a familiar ceremony in the first century. Many kings and conquering generals had entered Jerusalem over the years. Their entrance processions were marked by certain elements:

1. the ruler is escorted into the city by the citizenry of the army of the conqueror. "People spread their cloaks on the road.
2. the procession is accompanied by hymns or acclamations.
3. the procession included symbolic acts that communicated the authority of the ruler. (For example, Pontius Pilate would have entered the city on a war horse.)

The city of Jerusalem in their tradition was where heaven and earth met. Axis Mundi, the portal to the heavenly realm. Hear now, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Gospel of Luke, 19: 28-40

JESUS' ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Luke 19: 28-40

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.”

When Jesus interacted with those who are challenging him or asking him question, he often responded to them by quoting from the Hebrew Scripture, his Bible. He knew his Bible so well he not only spoke through it but also but enacted his calling, so people knew who he was. Jesus staged his entry into Jerusalem as a king the prophet Zechariah described in the Hebrew Scripture, showing through his action what kind of King he was.

The book of Zechariah says:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion.

Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.

Look, your king will come to you.

He is righteous and victorious.

He is humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.

10 He[c] will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem.

The bow used in battle will be cut off;
he will speak peace to the nations.

His rule will stretch from sea to sea,
and from the river to the ends of the earth

Understanding Jesus' action, the Gospel writer Luke has the cheering crowd sing his praises using Psalm 118, which we recited in Call to Worship, except, Luke changes "Blessed is the ONE who comes in the name of the Lord., to "Blessed is the KING, who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, Save us!"

Jesus is a king who brings peace on the earth and glory to God. And the Pharisees gets nervous because Jesus is mobilizing the crowd. He's rocking their boat in the vast sea of the Roman Empire. To keep THEIR peace with Rome, by the end of the week, they have Jesus arrested and handed over to the power-that-be of their world.

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

Luke 23: 1-12 Jesus before Pilate and Herod

The whole assembly got up and led Jesus to Pilate and began to accuse him. They said, "We have found this man misleading our people, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming that he is the Christ,

a king.” Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “That’s what you say.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no legal basis for action against this man.” But they objected strenuously, saying, “He agitates the people with his teaching throughout Judea—starting from Galilee all the way here.”

Hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was from Herod’s district, Pilate sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Herod was very glad to see Jesus, for he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to see him for quite some time. He was hoping to see Jesus perform some sign. Herod questioned Jesus at length, but Jesus didn’t respond to him. The chief priests and the legal experts were there, fiercely accusing Jesus. Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt. Herod mocked him by dressing Jesus in elegant clothes and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate and Herod became friends with each other that day. Before this, they had been enemies.

Luke 23: 13-25 Jesus Sentenced to Death.

Then Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people. He said to them, “You brought this man before me as one who was misleading the people. I have questioned him in your presence and found nothing in this man’s conduct that provides a legal basis for the charges you have brought against him. Neither did Herod, because Herod returned him to us. He’s done nothing that deserves death. Therefore, I’ll have him whipped, then let him go.” But with one voice they shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us.” (Barabbas had been thrown into prison because of a riot that

had occurred in the city, and for murder.) Pilate addressed them again because he wanted to release Jesus. They kept shouting out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” For the third time, Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done? I’ve found no legal basis for the death penalty in his case. Therefore, I will have him whipped, then let him go.” But they were adamant, shouting their demand that Jesus be crucified. Their voices won out. Pilate issued his decision to grant their request. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison because of a riot and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

Luke 23: 26-43 The Crucifixion of Jesus

As they led Jesus away, they grabbed Simon, a man from Cyrene, who was coming in from the countryside. They put the cross on his back and made him carry it behind Jesus. A huge crowd of people followed Jesus, including women, who were mourning and wailing for him. Jesus turned to the women and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t cry for me. Rather, cry for yourselves and your children. The time will come when they will say, ‘Happy are those who are unable to become pregnant, the wombs that never gave birth, and the breasts that never nursed a child.’ Then *they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’* If they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” They drew lots as a

way of dividing up his clothing. The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one.”

The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine and saying, “If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read “This is the king of the Jews.” One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us! Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing that you’ve also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23: 44-49. The Death of Jesus

It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o’clock, while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I entrust my life.” After he said this, he breathed for the last time. When the centurion saw what happened, he praised God, saying, “It’s really true: this man was righteous.” All the crowds who had come together to see this event returned to their homes beating their chests after seeing what had happened. And everyone who knew him, including

the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance observing these things.

Silence Meditation

GUIDED REFLECTION

Rev. Takako Terino

Let us rest in God, as we reflect on the unfolding of this week.
O Lord God, whose gracious love for us embraced that long and lonely journey to the cross, gather us close to you now as we make that journey in meditation and recollection.

Help us to contemplate again the way taken by our Savior: the false charges against him, the fear and flight of the disciples, the kiss of betrayal, the mocking and taunting.

Help us to recognize the presence of Jesus with us, when we have experienced, in however small way, what he was subjected to.

As we yield our hearts to you, give us courage to face those times in our own lives when he received the same at our hands; when we subjected others to the same treatment.

Your beloved Son Jesus took upon his person the brutality and cruelty of our world played out to its full force. On that cross, your Perfect Love absorbed our Imperfect Love acting out at its worst.

Yet, Jesus kept loving and forgiving them all the same, until the end, as you still love and forgive us today, in his name. Jesus, your love incarnate, saved us from our worst self, the part of us that resists, rebels, rejects, and refuses your love, that we might love and forgive one another, that we might live in peace.

Help us to understand you and your love for the world more clearly, the world Jesus lived in then and we live in today. Guard and guide us through all our days until we come at last to that day when all our days and journeys will be gathered into your eternity, and we shall be with you forever.
Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH Philippians 2: 5-11 (*insert*)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

People of God, we acknowledge that the world God created out of love, continues to resist and rebel against that loving force, and in so doing, we continue to mock and taunt Christ. But God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved from the grip of sin and death and become heirs with him of eternal life.

The Prayers of the People today takes the form of the Solemn Intercession, taken from the Book of Common Worship shared by many congregations, each one the body of Christ in this world. Let us pray.

Eternal God, by your Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified. Receive our prayers which we offer before you, for all members of your holy church, that in our vocation and ministry we may truly and devoutly serve you,

We pray for all nations and people of the earth, and for those in authority among them:

For the President of the United States, and the Congress and Supreme Court, for the members and representatives of the United Nations, and all who serve the common good, that by God's help, they may seek justice and truth and live in peace and concord. Kindle in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that justice and peace may increase, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love.

Remembering how Jesus prayed for those who crucified him, we pray for those who oppose your loving intention for the world and make themselves enemies of the cross of Christ. We pray also for all who in the name of Christ persecute others, that you open their hearts to the truth and lead them to faith and obedience.

Gracious God, the comfort of all who sorrow, the strength of all who suffer, we pray for all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind. For the hungry and homeless, and the destitute and the oppressed, and all who suffer persecution. For the sorrowful and bereaved, for those in prison. Hear the cry of those in misery and need. In their afflictions show them your mercy, and give us, we pray, the strength to serve them. Hear now the prayers arising from this community of faith.

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Eternal God of unchanging power and light, look with mercy on your whole church. Bring to completion your saving work, so that the whole world may see the fallen lifted up, the old made new, and all things brought to perfection by him through whom all things were made, our Lord Jesus Christ. We offer these prayers together with the prayer our savior taught us,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever. Amen