



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2025
ISAIAH 50:4-9A; PSALM 31:9-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11:1; LUKE 23:1-49

HELD BY PARADOX

Welcome to Holy Week. We enter this week by joining with Jesus in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We walk with him from exultation to execution. It's a week of wild mood swings, paradoxes, and disappointed expectations. If you are feeling emotional whiplash right now, it's understandable. You should. That's the nature of this week.

If the Palm Sunday story is about anything, it's a story about disappointed expectations. A story of what happens when the God we want and think we know doesn't show up, and another God

– a less efficient, less aggressive, far less muscular God - shows up instead. When that happens, when our cries of “save us now” (that's what “Hosanna” means) are met with heartbreaking silence, our hosannas go dark and our palm branches wither. We walk away, we close our hearts, and we deny and betray the image of God in ourselves and in each other. If push comes to shove, our hosannas give way to hatred, and we strike to kill. Do you see the parallels between the Palm Sunday story and our current world troubles? An insatiable thirst for power and domination that condemns and kills the powerless – good, simple, and just

people who threaten our preferred order or are just in the way? My friends, this isn't the just the story of Jesus. It's our story, too. And that's what gives it power.

If there's a single day on the liturgical calendar that illustrates the dissonance at the heart of our faith, it's Palm Sunday. More than any other, this festive, ominous, and complicated day of palm fronds and hosanna banners warns us that paradoxes we might not like are woven right into the fabric of Christianity. God on a donkey. Dying to live. A suffering king. *Good Friday*.

These paradoxes are what give Jesus's story its shape, weight, and texture, calling us at every moment to hold together truths that seem bizarre, counterintuitive, and irreconcilable. On good days, I understand that these paradoxes are precisely what afford my religion its credibility. If I live in a world

that's full of pain, mystery, and contradiction, then I need a religion robust enough to bear the weight of that messy world. I need a religion that empowers me, in Richard Rohr's¹ beautiful words, "to live in exquisite, terrible humility before reality."¹ But the question is: will I choose the humble and the real? Or will I insist on the delusions of empire? Will I accompany Jesus on his ridiculous donkey, honoring the precarious path he has chosen? Or will my impatient and broken hosanna undermine my journey?

Whatever we choose, we are on this paradoxical journey of despair and hope. Despair and hope travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take. We live this deep paradox with every step we take.

¹ Rohr, Richard with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*. Whitaker House, New Kensington PA, 2016

In the end, my solace is this: it's not that I hold paradox, *it's that paradox holds me*. I am held and embraced by a God who is too big for thin, one-dimensional truths – even my own, most cherished, one-dimensional truths. I am held by a God who sticks with me even when I won't stick with her. A God who accepts my worship even when it is stingy, half-baked, and selfish. A God who knows all the reasons my heart cries, "Save now!" and carries those broken, strangled cries to the cross for me and with me.

Still. Still the truth is, I am afraid of what lies ahead. Who knows how many deaths lie waiting around the corner? How many sorrows, disappointments, farewells, and jagged endings you or I must face before resurrection comes home to stay? I can't imagine most of it, and sometimes I can't bear any of it. But

Jesus can. If anything in this Christian story is true, then this must be true as well: **Jesus will not leave us alone**. There is no death we will die, small or big, literal or figurative, that Jesus will not hold in his crucified arms.

Welcome to Holy Week. Here we are, and here is our God. Here are our hosannas, broken and unbroken, hopeful and hungry. Blessed is the One who comes to die so that we will live.



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