



Palm Sunday

March 28, 2021

Introduction

This week, the center of the church's year, is one of striking contrasts: Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by shouts of glory, only to be left alone to die on the cross, abandoned by even his closest friends. Mark's gospel presents Jesus in his complete human vulnerability: agitated, grieved, scared, forsaken. Though we lament Christ's suffering and all human suffering, we also expect God's salvation. We enter this holy week ready for the completion of God's astonishing work.

Blessing of the Palms

We praise you, O God,
for redeeming the world through our Savior Jesus Christ.
Today we recall that he entered the holy city in triumph
and was proclaimed messiah and king by those
who spread garments and branches along his way.
As we gather in our homes without palm branches this year,
help us to know it is not about the green vegetation,
but about our hands that do your will.
Bless the palms of our hands and help us
to love the world as you have loved us.
Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross,
so that, joined to his death and resurrection,
we enter into life with you; through the same Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Hymn of the Day

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Lesson: Zechariah 9:9-12

The coming messianic king will inaugurate an era of disarmament and prosperity. Because of God's covenant with Israel, the people are designated as "prisoners of hope."

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Psalm 118:25-29

²⁵Hosanna! O LORD, save us! We pray to you, LORD, prosper our days!

²⁶**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
we bless you from the house of the LORD.**

²⁷The LORD is God and has given us light.

Form a procession with branches up to the corners of the altar.

²⁸**You are my God, and I will thank you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.**

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good; God's mercy endures forever.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Christ did not act to attain status and glory but was obedient to God even to the point of death. Following Christ's example, we do not seek personal status or glory but care for others as God cared for us in Christ's death.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: Mark 11:1-11

Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Perhaps some of you grew up watching the television show **Adventures of Superman** starring George Reeves (which was already in reruns when I was a child) or the series of **Superman** movies starring Christopher Reeve. I watched – and enjoyed – both.

You may not need much reminder: Superman lived most of his life disguised as the mild-mannered newspaper reporter Clark Kent, but whenever disaster was about to strike, Superman would fly into action to save the day, setting things right again in the world. Clark Kent looked like an ordinary human being; while Superman was extraordinary.

Superheroes like Superman are great fun fiction to watch. But we live in a world that is now - and seems to have always been - divided by strife. Endangered by tyrants. Battered by natural disasters. Ravaged by plagues. And deeply troubled by endless more ordinary, everyday difficulties. No fantastic superhero can right all those wrongs.

Life was certainly like that for the people of Israel. We read throughout the Old Testament of wars and exiles, floods and plagues, and droughts and famine. Some of those were caused directly by God's actions; more were naturally occurring. God was present and at work in all those situations.

Still, the people expected and yearned for a savior. Their very own superhero. The Anointed One; the Messiah who had been promised.

They were certainly expecting a great warrior king. Maybe not someone who would fly in like Superman, but someone who would ride in leading an army, as I imagine a knight on a white charger. Someone who would free them from tyranny and bring them peace. Who would restore the kingdom as they remembered it under the greatest kings they had ever known, David and Solomon. Surely life would be good again then.

Today's gospel tells us about Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem in the days before the annual Passover celebration. The city would have been packed with visitors; Jewish pilgrims from the surrounding countryside who had come to celebrate Passover, as well as folks from farther away who wanted to see the great city and participate in all the events during this holy time.

Jesus rides in on a borrowed colt. He was an unlikely hero, yet many in the crowd must have recognized him from hearing him preach and teach. Perhaps they had witnessed him perform a healing miracle or two in their own villages.

Someone, perhaps remembering the prophecy from Zechariah or the words of Psalm 118, began the chant. Others joined in, breaking branches off trees or throwing down their cloaks on the dusty road. They gave him a royal red-carpet welcome to the holy city.

Those people longed for a king of their own. A mighty hero who would overthrow the Roman government that occupied and controlled their land and their lives. They were claiming what God had promised them throughout their holy stories. They greeted Jesus with cries of "Hosanna!" Save us!"

Just a few short days later, another crowd in the same city, possibly including some of the very same people, shouted in answer to Pilate's questions, "Crucify him!" How quickly the tide of sentiment turned. We will read the rest of the story of that Passover festival on Good Friday.

What we know from the rest of the gospel account and from story of Christianity from that day to this, is that the people did not get exactly what they expected. Yet, they received exactly what God had always planned.

The people that day – and in fact all people of every time - received what the Almighty God of love, grace, and mercy had planned for us all along.

Not a superhero to avert one crisis and save the day for a few people, but a Savior – both fully human and fully divine – who came to show everyone the love of God through his own death on a cross, and to provide us with eternal life in his presence through his own Resurrection.

This day, we sing and shout hosannas with the crowd, knowing how much we need to be saved. And, God forgive us, we have at some time undoubtedly joined with the voices shouting for Jesus to be crucified.

But most of all, we pray that we will live faithfully in gratitude and love, seeking justice and peace in the world, as followers of the Way of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Ride On, Ride On in Majesty!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

In Jesus you came among us as a suffering servant. Give your church humility. Redeem your people from pride and the certainty that we always know your will. Heal us and empower us to confess Christ crucified. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In creation, life springs from death. Redeem your creation awaiting resurrection: restore lost habitats and endangered species. Create new possibilities for areas affected by climate change, grant relief from natural disasters, and nurture new growth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Jesus was handed over to the powers of this world. In all nations, instruct the powerful, that they would not exploit their power but maintain justice. Sustain soldiers, and guide those who command them, that they serve those in greatest need. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

On the cross Jesus joined all who feel forsaken. Abide with those who are condemned to death. Defend those who are falsely accused. Console and strengthen those who are mocked or bullied. Accompany all who suffer and grant respite and renewal to all, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You called followers to tend Jesus' body in death. Sustain hospice workers and funeral directors. Bless our ministries at times of death: those who plan and lead funerals, those who prepare meals, all who offer support in grief. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You inspired the centurion to confess Jesus as your Son. We praise you for the faith you have given to people of all places and times. Give us also such faith to trust the promises of baptism and, with them, to look for the resurrection of the dead. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Prepare the Royal Highway

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.
Prayers for Blessing of the Palms was written by Pastor Jerry Whirtley.