

Natalie W. Bell  
 April 10, 2022  
 Palm Sunday

*Palms to Passion*  
*Selections Luke 23*

*Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.*

*2 They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."*

*3 Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so."*

*4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man."*

*5 But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."*

*Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people,*

*14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him"*

*15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.*

*16 I will therefore have him flogged and release him."*

*17 18 Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!"*

*19 (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.*

*20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;*

*21 but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"*

*22 A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him."*

*23 But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and **their voices prevailed.***

*24 So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.*

*25 He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.*

*26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.....*

*32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, **they crucified Jesus** there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.*

*34 [Then Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them**; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.*

*35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"*

*36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine*

*37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

*38 There was also an **inscription** over him, "This is the King of the Jews.*

*39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

*40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"*

*41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man **has done nothing wrong.**"*

*42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

*43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, **today you will be with me in Paradise.**"*

*44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,*

*45 while the sun's light failed; and the **curtain** of the temple was torn in two.*

*46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "**Father, into your hands** I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.*

*47 When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "**Certainly this man was innocent.**"*

Today is both **Palm** Sunday, AND **Passion** Sunday.

TODAY we remember the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem with palm branches waving,

And we remember the last days and hours of Jesus' life.

It all began with shouts of praise,

But ended on a **cross**.

The week went from **Palm** branches and celebration to the **Passion** of Jesus' last meal, his arrest, and his crucifixion.

On Sunday the crowds **cheered** him,

on Friday they called for his **death**.

We could focus only on the celebration of Palm Sunday.....  
 But today is the *last Sunday* before Easter,  
 And it doesn't make sense to *skip*  
 from the celebration of the Palms to the  
 celebration of the empty *tomb*  
 without pausing today, and all week,  
 to remember what Jesus did for us.  
 The empty tomb *isn't the same without the cross!*

So today we remember the cheering crowd—  
 Luke reminds us that they are cheering  
 because they have seen Jesus' miracles, and heard his teaching.  
 And they are cheering him as a new King...  
 Even though he comes riding into Jerusalem humbly on a lowly donkey.

After today, we'll move through the week.  
 On *Maundy* Thursday we'll remember the Last Supper,  
 how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and gave them a new commandment, to  
 love one another as He loves us.  
 That night we'll take communion in remembrance of Him.

On *Good Friday* we'll remember the darkness of the crucifixion.  
 And his gift of self-sacrificing love.

Today *sets the stage* for this entire Holy week.

Remember how we've heard Philippians 2, all throughout Lent?  
 From Palm Sunday to Good Friday, we see *Jesus' humility*  
 The same humility that we are called to *imitate*.

*3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*

*4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*

*5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

*6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,*

*7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,*

*8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.*

Jesus came into this world as one of us, and then he *humbly gave his life* for us. His death on the cross saved us.

But his life and death is *so different* from the way we live in the world today, isn't it?

We are not humble people, are we?

Even the disciples *James and John* were tempted by pride, asking to sit on each side of Jesus in his kingdom?

And what did *Jesus say*?

*He said, "You do not know what you are asking... whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,"*<sup>44</sup> *and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.*<sup>45</sup> *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

Last week we heard more about humility from Jesus.

He urged us to *take the lowest seat* at the table when invited to a banquet, because *all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.* (Luke 14)

The truth is---Jesus' way of life

*wouldn't get Him very far in our world today, would it?*

Our world celebrates *power, and pride!*

We live in a world where *self-centeredness* is practically a virtue.

All the slogans of our culture—are about **self. Me. Me. Me.**

And power!

People today use *power* exactly the way Jesus warned against

--to *lord it* over others, and act like *tyrants!*

In an article for *The Wall Street Journal*, researcher Jonah Lehrer noted that when people start to get close to the *top of any social ladder, they start acting like fools!*

Some people with lots of power tend to behave like neurological patients with a *damaged [frontal lobe]*, the brain area for empathy and decision-making.

Lehrer noted a study in which psychologists asked members of a "high-power group" about *speeding*.

The group concluded that it was okay *for them to speed*, but that it was important for *others to follow* the posted speed limit.

Their rationale?

Well, **powerful people are important** and have a good reason for speeding!  
 Jonah Lehrer, "The Power Trap," The Wall Street Journal (8-14-10)  
 Sounds **familiar**, doesn't it?

**Jesus was not like this.**

**Jesus had more power** than anyone else on earth, being God himself,  
 But he didn't consider that power something to be exploited.  
 He rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey.  
 He **washed the feet** of his disciples  
 He **fed** them, with symbols of his own body and blood.  
 He was **arrested, beaten, and nailed** to a cross.

Jesus was the **ultimate example** of humility, and selflessness.  
 And Paul urges us to have the '**same mind**' as **Christ Jesus!**  
 We are called to the **same path** of humility, sacrifice, and self-giving love.

Even though such a life of humility,  
 is the **exact opposite** of what our world teaches!

So as we enter this Holy Week,  
 How can we **empty ourselves** for others, as we follow Christ to the cross?

In his book *The Reason for God*, Pastor Tim Keller says people show self-emptying sacrifice on a small scale in **most serious loving relationships**.  
 He writes: **Consider parenting.**

*Children come into the world in ...complete dependence.  
 They cannot operate as self-sufficient, independent agents  
 unless their parents give up much of their own independence  
 and freedom for years.*

*If you don't allow your children to hinder your freedom in work and play at all,  
 and if you only get to your children when it's convenient,  
 your children will grow up only physically.*

*In all other ways they will remain emotionally needy, troubled, and overdependent.  
 The choice is clear.*

*You can either **sacrifice your freedom or theirs**. It's them or you.*

*To love your child well, you must **decrease that they may increase**.*

*..so eventually they can experience the freedom and independence you have.*

*All life-changing love ... is ... sacrifice....*

*How can God be a **God of love** if he does not become personally involved in suffering the same violence, oppression, grief, weakness, and pain that we experience? The answer to that is twofold: First, **God can't**.*

*Second, **only one major religion** even claims that God does.*

*Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 201–202*

God **HAS** become *personally involved* in the pain of this world,  
Through Jesus Christ.

The cross—reminds us that **Christ is with us** in all our pain, suffering, and trials.

Jesus was totally **vulnerable** during Holy Week—

So following his path of humility means **vulnerability in OUR lives** too!

I once read a funny article about a **Princeton professor**  
who decided he was tired of hearing academics brag about their work.

So, he decided to '**brag**' about his failures!

He published a resume on Twitter about his academic failures!

It includes sections titled

*"Degree programs I did **not** get into,"*

*"Research funding I did **not** get" and*

*"Paper **rejections** from academic journals."*

**WHY did he do this?**

Because he believes that projecting only success and not admitting failure has  
damaging effects. This assistant professor of psychology and public affairs

Johannes Haushofer said, "[My] CV of Failures is an attempt

**to balance the record and provide some perspective**".

Marguerite Ward, "This Princeton Professor Posted His CV Of Failures For The World To See,"  
CNBC.com (4-27-16).

What **if we did the SAME thing?**

Aren't we called to do this, as humble servants of Christ?

Aren't we called to be **vulnerable, real, open and honest?**

Maybe not tweeting about our failures,

but maybe **opening up** about them

to our brothers and sisters in Christ?

To people **who are struggling** just as we are?

Wouldn't that make the **church more Christ-like?**

What if we stopped **thinking** about our own pride and power?

And thought about how much we need God?

This downward path of humility *isn't easy*.  
 It IS hard to be humble.  
 It can *only be achieved* with the *help* of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

*But we can start to move downward--*  
 By taking the *FOCUS off ourselves*,  
 and putting it all on our Savior Jesus Christ.  
 Especially as we enter this Holy Week.

*C.S. Lewis* famously said, “*true humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less*”

This also means that we *serve, wherever we see a need*.  
 Just like we see people in this church doing all the time--  
 as *saints behind the scenes*,  
 Following Jesus' *path of humility!*  
*What if we ALL did that?*

This week, we *remember Jesus last days and hours on earth*.  
 And all that he did for us.  
 We remember the *Palms*, and the *cross*.  
 We remember that the journey to the *cross is central* to our faith—  
 Without it, we don't have the empty tomb and Easter!

And we remember how Jesus tells all of us,  
*Take up your cross and follow me*.  
 In this Holy Week, his request takes on even more meaning, doesn't it?  
*How WILL WE take up our cross today, and follow Him?*

Hear the *Good News of the Gospel* as you journey through Holy Week.  
 This story of humility, self-emptying love, service, and sacrifice.  
 It is *JESUS' story*. And, it is *OUR story*.

May God give us the *same mind* as Christ Jesus,  
 May we *follow his path* of humility,  
*All the way to the cross, and beyond*.  
*And may all God's people say together, Amen*.