

**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday**

**Year C
RCL**



Philippians 2:5-11
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Luke 19:28-40

The Collect

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 2:5-11

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 should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Psalm 118:1-2, 28-29 Page 760, BCP

Confitemini Domino

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.

²Let Israel now proclaim,
“His mercy endures for ever.”

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

²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.

Luke 19:28-40

After telling a parable to the crowd at Jericho, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down

from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

SERMON

How loud is your faith, church? Can it be heard by those around you? What do they hear? A polite murmuring? An in-your-face shout? A firm assertion? I don't think that quiet Christians are living up to their potential at all. Presbyterians are certainly not known as the party animals of Protestantism, but sometimes, church, you have to stir it up a little if you're going to be heard.

Today is Palm Sunday, can I get an amen? See there? You can do it. Today is Palm Sunday, the day we generally hear a sermon about how the crowd welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, only to turn on him later. Then we cluck our tongues some more about the general lack of good manners shown by that, and go to lunch. I don't want to do that this Sunday. I want to follow Jesus more closely than that. I want to make a noise, and not the usual sort of noises we think about when people get ec-

static about their faith. I want to make a great noise that the whole world will hear that, as bad as it is, it doesn't have to be this way! I want to reclaim the noise Jesus was making because, you see, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was making a tremendous noise. That's what I want us to do – I want us, for once, to be loud Christians. I want us to shout out that God is sovereign, that we live in His world, that it is by His grace that we draw breath and that it's high time the world took notice of that.

We've allowed ourselves to become such polite, in-offensive Christians that it seems to me that we are almost apologetic about our faith. "Oh, sorry. I'm a Christian. I can't do such and so..." Worse yet, we sometimes go along with something everybody else is doing because we don't want to draw attention to ourselves. The problem, church, is that we've lost touch with what a

political movement Jesus represented to the people of His time and what an enormous noise that it was.

I was considering a painting in the education building. You know the one I mean. Jesus stands knocking at a door with no door knob. The symbolism is that the door is your heart and the latch is on your side. Jesus can only knock. You must open the door. That's a neat bit of symbolism and the painting appears somewhere in nearly every church everywhere, but what I was looking at was the image of Jesus. He has flowing soft brown hair, European features, and light eyes. The artist has remade Jesus into something more acceptable to us. This, I'd suggest, is a very wrong thing to do. If we are to be followers of Jesus, we mustn't remake him into something of our own design. We need to follow Him as He is, and the path He leads us into is sometimes harrowing. The entry into Jerusalem shows us just how harrow-

ing. I think we may have remade this story into something much more palatable and much less harrowing. Let's see how Luke portrays it.

We have been taught that the people of Jerusalem and the Temple authorities failed to recognize who Jesus was. That is true, but it is also beyond question that the Temple authorities did recognize Jesus as a very big threat to business as usual, for as much as I like a David and Goliath story, Jesus had at his command more than just twelve disciples. What was about to happen had been carefully planned and was going to rock the very foundations of a political compromise that had undermined God's people's relationship with Him.

Jerusalem had been under the control of Rome for a hundred years. Rome's approach to conquered territories was simple and effective. Rome wanted the collection of taxes to be done in good order. They wanted

peaceful streets. So long as these two things were accomplished – the society was orderly, and, most importantly, the taxes were collected – they could put up with an awful lot of other things

On the other hand, the Jewish authorities wanted an orderly society in which they could continue to worship in their ancient ways, where the Temple administration structure was maintained, and, politicians being politicians, it wouldn't hurt to make a few denarii into the bargain. Politics is the art of the possible and early on, the politicians on both sides saw that their interests were not entirely opposed. A deal was struck. By leave of the Emperor, who would appoint the high priest, the Temple authorities and police were granted a lot of power in keeping the people in line. Jewish tax collectors would collect the taxes, keeping a portion (and kicking back some, if I'm not greatly mistaken). By leave of the Em-

peror, the people were relieved of the necessity of worshipping Roman gods. By leave of the Emperor, the people could worship God in peace and the Temple would remain inviolable.

By leave of the Emperor. God's people worshiped God by leave of the Emperor. God was about to do a mighty thing, a thing that would echo for two thousand years, right down to us. God was re-asserting Himself.

From the Mount of Olives, Jesus dispatched two of his disciples to an adjoining village to fetch a colt. He gave them a password.

Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this, "The Lord needs it."

Why is Jesus doing this? Why is there need for such secrecy? It is because Jesus is about to enact a parable,

and that parable has its genesis in Zechariah 9:9.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a colt, he didn't enter Jerusalem as a visitor or a tourist. He entered as a king. Such an entry, which would have been plain to every Jew in Jerusalem from the Zechariah passage, was a direct statement to the Emperor. "I am", said Jesus' entry. "I am."

Two thousand years later, when we think of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem we have a mental image of all of Jerusalem waving palms, but that's John's account. In Luke, there are no palms, and it is the disciples who shout.

. . . after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

What are Jesus and His disciples saying? How loud is their faith? It's LOUD, church! They are challenging the political agreements between the Temple and Rome that have permitted Palestine what little peace it had known over the last century. Jesus and the disciples are saying that God's people do not worship God by leave of the Emperor or anybody else, and they are saying it so loudly that no one in Palestine, from the beggar on

the street to the High Priest can fail to hear:

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

In the 1980’s the people of South Africa suffered under the sin of apartheid. It wasn’t just the blacks who suffered. All South Africans suffered as citizens of color were denied their rightful place in society. The United States adopted a policy of “friendly persuasion” to encourage the government of South Africa to grant basic human dignity to her people. Bishop Desmond Tutu, though, advocated “disinvestment”, the radical withdrawal of foreign investment from the economy of South Africa until the government abolished the policy of apartheid, even though such a policy would put poor blacks out of work. When asked, Bishop Tutu agreed that blacks would suffer, but he said that now they

would suffer for a purpose. In 1985, the world withdrew its investment from South Africa. The economy sank. The costs were terrible in human misery, but apartheid fell, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and became president. Desmond Tutu and his followers took upon themselves the fury of the sinful apartheid system, and bore their stripes for the whole world to see until the whole world DID see and apartheid fell.

In this country, capitalism run wild led to an unheard-of wealth inequality. As the ultra-wealthy sucked money out of the economy, more and more people fell beneath the burden it created. When this happened in 18th Century France, Madam Guillotine had much work. But Bishop Tutu showed us that countering violence with violence just breeds more violence. In this country, the Occupy Wall Street movement peacefully sat and waited for the police to pepper spray them so that the

whole world could see that an unjust system would respond unjustly. The photograph of police at UC Davis walking along a line of passively sitting people with large canisters of pepper spray will live into the future alongside the photograph of the young woman at Kent State weeping over the body of her classmate, shot by National Guard soldiers.

This is just what Jesus and his followers are doing on Palm Sunday. Jesus will be lifted up upon the cross. The whole world will be able to see His suffering and every precious drop of His blood will fall to earth as an indictment of the sinfulness of man which cannot tear itself from its thirst for personal power.

How loud is your faith, church?

On June 6, 1967, at Cape Town, South Africa, Robert F. Kennedy said,

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage

and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and ...those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Yes, the faith of the disciples was loud that day of entry into Jerusalem. It was so loud, so unmistakable that some of the Pharisees in the crowd, their courage failing them and scared pea-green, begged, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” All of God’s creation would shout out that God is sovereign, that it is His world in which we live. All of God’s creation would shout out that we live by God’s grace and none other.

How loud is your faith, church?

AMEN