

**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.*

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; *
his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let Israel now proclaim, *
“His mercy endures for ever.”
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; *
I will enter them;
I will offer thanks to the LORD.
- 20 “This is the gate of the LORD; *
he who is righteous may enter.”
- 21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me *
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The same stone which the builders rejected *
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the LORD's doing, *
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 On this day the LORD has acted; *
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
- 25 Hosannah, LORD, hosannah! *

LORD, send us now success.

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; *

we bless you from the house of the LORD.

27 God is the LORD; he has shined upon us; *
form a procession with branches up to the horns
of the altar.

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.

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.

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

We Christians, by and large, are pretty much status quo people. Once we start doing something one way, you can bet the rent money that any suggestion we do it another way will be met with resistance. If I suggested that all the people that sit on this side of the sanctuary go and sit on that side one Sunday there would be a great disquiet. The ironic thing for Christians is that our faith began with an all-out assault on the status quo. We follow Jesus on Palm Sunday as he enters Jerusalem to confront a status quo which had made the Emperor the leader of the pack. However sentimentally we have chosen to imagine Palm Sunday as something to do with children waving palms, the truth is much darker. The actions of Jesus and His disciples would shake the Roman empire from the top to the bottom, and finally would swallow it. Over the course of so many years

we've lost touch with what a confrontational movement Jesus' band of followers were. We've remade Jesus into someone much less alarming than He was – someone we can be more at ease with. In course of doing that, we have stripped Jesus of the power that He brought, and that's both a mistake and a sin.

I was looking at the painting of Jesus in the education building. 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 and invite Him in. That's a neat bit of symbolism, but what I noticed was the image of Jesus. He has flowing soft brown hair, European features, and light eyes. Jesus came to remake us into a more perfect image of God's creation. We have responded by remaking Jesus into a more perfect image of us! If we are to be followers of Jesus, we can't remake him into

something of our own design. We must follow Him as He is, and the path He leads us on is harrowing.

We have been taught that the people of Jerusalem failed to recognize who Jesus was. I think that is true, but it's also true that the Temple authorities **did** recognize Jesus as a very big threat to the status quo which was serving them very nicely indeed, thank you very much. Jesus came to town with issues. What was about to happen had been carefully planned and was going to rock the very foundations of a political compromise that had undermined the relationship between God and His people.

Jerusalem had been under the control of Rome for a hundred years. Roman rule was not popular, but it was all these people had known for three generations. You don't maintain the occupation of a territory for that long without collusion from the other side, and that is just

what Rome had in the Temple authorities. They had negotiated a peace that served both of them well. In the interest of political expediency, God's position as Lord had been allowed to fade in favor of the power of the Empire. Rome's rule might have been efficient, and even benevolent in some ways, but Rome's rule was inconsistent with God's rule. There can be only one leader of the pack. Jesus was insisting that the one was not Rome.

We think of Rome as a cruel occupying force, and that is certainly not untrue, but on balance, 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. They could put up with an awful lot of other things if these two things were accomplished. In similar fashion, the Jewish authorities wanted an orderly society in which they

could continue to worship in their ancient ways. 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 Emperor, the people were relieved of the necessity of worshiping Roman gods or serving in the military. By leave of the Emperor, the people could worship God in peace and the Temple would remain sacrosanct.

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. There can be only one leader of

the pack. We do not worship God by leave of anybody. Jerusalem was about to see incontrovertible proof that even the worst that Rome could do was not enough to match the power of God.

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

“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.’”

Jesus is about to enact a prophecy from Zechariah.

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. Just in case there was someone in Jerusalem so benighted as to not get the image from Zechariah, the disciples shout His title.

. . . 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!”

Jesus and His disciples are challenging the political agreements between the Temple and Rome that have permitted Judea 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 Judea, from the beggar on the street to the High Priest can fail to hear. They made this statement so unmistakable that some of the Pharisees in the crowd, their courage failing them, 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. If these ones were silent, all of God’s creation would shout out that there can be only one leader of the pack.

God Incarnate has entered Jerusalem announcing, “I will come into Jerusalem as its king. I will submit myself to the worst manifestation of sin that this people can manage. Despite it all, I will rise victorious and all the world shall know – and my people shall know – that they belong to me. There is no power above me.” Jesus,

astride a colt, confronted the status quo which had served both Rome and Judea well in making the best of their relationship and found it wanting. By His actions, His death and resurrection, He overturned the old status quo and brought us a new Testament.

You and I don't have a Roman Empire to confront, but we do have a status quo that is every bit as entrenched as that which Jesus found in Jerusalem. We get set in our ways. The more set we become, the less we can hear the voice of God. So, every year, at Lent, we follow Jesus into the City of God, to confront the status quo which we have allowed to grow up over the past year in our relationship to God. The scope of our faith is limited by our level of comfort with confronting the world about its sins. Each of us is aware of where the pain is for our brothers and sisters. Each of us know of hunger, of injustice, of failures to comfort, and each of

us has acted only within our comfort zone – our status quo – during the past year. Holy Week comes each year to tell us that just as Jesus confronted the Temple authorities, we are to confront our limitations so that this coming year, we will pour ourselves out more unselfishly, just as Jesus did. Our comfortable lives are confronted by Jesus who tells us that a quiet Christianity which disturbs no one is wanting. During Lent and Holy Week, we confront the compromises we made with sin to find comfortable berth, and we are convicted.

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is our invitation to allow Jesus the King to enter our hearts – the real Jesus, who will convict us of our sins and compromises, forgive us our shortcomings, and free us to make a glad noise unto all creation. What compromises which you have made with your faith this year are you willing to

confront this Holy Week?

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Our comfort and our customs are the quicksand in which we are mired. Holy Week is the time of the year when Jesus reminds us of His power. Just as Jesus faced the cross, we are called to confront those forces, pleasant though they may be, which enslave us.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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