

**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Sunday of the Passion ~ Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024

Year B.

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-20; Mark 11:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

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*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. (Philippians 2:5-7)*

On Palm Sunday, the people are cheering for Jesus; they’re waving palm branches and throwing their coats on the street for him to ride over with his donkey. It’s a parade fit for a king, as they shout *Hosanna!* *Save us!* He’s got the backing of the people. They’re in the palm of his hand. It’s a good parade. Safe, happy, relaxed, and free. But there will come another parade this week; a parade marked with a different tone. These same people watching from the curb today will shout: *“Crucify him!”* They will curse and exploit him, spitting in disgust as he carries his heavy cross under a crown of thorns.

This is what it looks like to be the God we meet in Jesus. As Paul says in Philippians, Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” For Jesus, all the pomp-and-circumstance ended in his bearing our sinful consequence. All the pageantry ended in travesty. It was his majesty to give the people their wish to “save us” by taking it upon himself. All the hurt and shame; the hatred and thirst for revenge so that we might be free. Between these two parades, one of pageantry and one of mockery, Jesus shows us how to love and what true power looks like.

And yet, it is not only people who are redeemed this Holy Week. There are cosmic consequences happening all throughout the narrative. If you’re looking for an eco-faith connection, consider the ways nature itself groans on this final day of Jesus’ life. The temple curtain is torn in two (Mark 15:38); darkness came over the land, blotting out the sun (Luke 23:44); and the earth shook, causing the dead to rise and walk about (Matthew 27:51-53). Even Jesus acknowledges the humble boulders strewn along the roadside when the priests order his followers to be quiet. He simply says: “If these were silent, even the stones will cry out!” (Luke 19:40)

Here is a “Cosmic Christ” who empties himself, humbly. All the unnamable majesty of a God beyond comprehension was poured into this human, Jesus. As Paul reminds us, Jesus didn’t consider his divinity as something to be exploited. Just think of the many ways we exploit the earth, its resources and one another, for momentary gain or gratification. Maybe we’ve gotten better at caring for the earth in some respects, and yet, what if we learned how to “empty ourselves” for the sake of others? How might it benefit not only our neighbors but the sun, moon, plants and animals of the earth as well?

If you’ve given up on things getting any better, when it comes to the climate crisis, consider this: see how, in one fell swoop Jesus redefines greatness. Somehow, through difficult times and situations we come to know more fully the joy, freedom, and restoration of this life – all of LIFE. This Palm Sunday, let’s stand on both parade routes and trust that it’s not a lost cause after all. There is hope for a forsaken planet that groans with the effects of climate change. There is hope for those who betrayed Jesus, who were forgiven from the cross, and who trust in his name to this day.

**Let us pray:** O God, you sent your son to save us, though he wasn’t what we expected. Forgive us when we betray you and make our lives miserable. Thank you for loving us in spite of it all and for restoring the friendship between us and the natural world around us. May we do the same in our own lives each day. In Jesus’ name we pray: Amen.

 John Stiles is the pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Pine City, MN. He has served churches throughout Minnesota for 30 years, and currently lives in Chisago City, where he bought a house recently after a divorce. Outside his work as a minister, John’s interests include canoeing, knitting, bonsai trees, guitar and artificial intelligence. His two adult children also live in Minnesota with their families.