

Palm Sunday  
April 5, 2020  
The Rev. Jamie Samilio  
Church of the Holy Cross, Dunn Loring VA

## **Fasten Your Seatbelt**

I cannot escape my nature, and I am a fixer. I love fixing things. Even as a child I would take things apart and put them back together—including my alarm clock. I come by this naturally, my desire to make things right, to make things new, is deep. But I am only human, and I know my limitations. I cannot fix the whole world. And we live in a very broken world.

We are resilient, however. We have hope. We have each other. We understand right from wrong. But that all goes out the window when our backs are against the wall. What does that mean? When are backs against the wall? It means that when we are caught, when we have no place to run and must make a decision—sometimes a decision that will change the course of our lives—what will we choose? When our backs are against the wall is when we find out who we really are, and whose we really are. We want to do the next right thing in front of us, but first we need to know in our hearts what is right. And sometimes, what is right for you may mean making a decision that won't be comfortable for me.

So, what did Jesus do? The scriptures are full of times when the disciples questioned what Jesus was doing. Was he crazy to fly in the face of the Pharisees and the Roman empire? Every good king has an army, but he fought his battles with words and actions, not a sword. In our very best human style, we took the words and actions of Jesus and turned them into justifications for fighting wars and enriching ourselves, all in the name of doing the right thing.

In good times, we tend to rally behind the winners. We want a champion to follow. We need an example, who when emulated, makes us champions as well. We are driven to be the best, the strongest, the fastest, the most successful—we follow people who show us how to do that, how to be those things. When it comes to Jesus however, we try to apply our concepts of what it means to be strong and successful to a set of definitions Jesus has given us—the parts do not always fit together. When we try to fix what is broken, we find we need to forge entirely new parts, because the cookie cutter parts we think will fit will not work in the world Jesus wants us to create.

I like to think that I am a good person. I want to think that my natural propensity to fix things makes me valuable to a broken world, but my value is really only as good as my ability to take the plank out of my own eye, and see the world as God has created it to be. In God's world we are not here for ourselves, but for each other. Not being for ourselves throws a curve into our human way of being. If we are going to follow Jesus, really follow Jesus, then we need to be here for each other first. We need to recognize that God does not value any one person, race, or religion over another. We need to be there for the other, no matter how different they are from us. Without God I am self-centered. All this is to say that without God, without changing my center from self to God, I cannot fix anything or anyone, not even myself.

What has all of this to do with Palm Sunday? Let's look at the scriptures: *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"* When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, *"Who is this?"* The crowds were saying, *"This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."*

Prophets, it seems, have always been around. They are people who are said to have a direct link to the divine. They are intermediaries who can speak on behalf of the divine. In Jesus' time they were very important. Imagine having a direct link to God. Imagine being able to show through actions the divine power that can overcome the laws of nature—heal the sick, feed the hungry, calm the storms. Way cool.

I know I want to be aligned with that person, I know I would be smiling, raising palms and branches in the air, and laying them down to create a smooth path for that kind of prophet. Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord...and...and, I want to be that person who comes in the name of the Lord too. I want to follow this Jesus, I want to do what Jesus would do—look how popular He is, I want to be like that guy, yeah! Hey Jesus, look at me, I am praising you, got my palms here, I am on your side! Let me know if you need anything; I can fix it for you, seriously!

Yep, that would be me—until I realize that what Jesus is actually asking me to do is not what I think I need to do to share in His praise and His glory. Stay with Him, stay awake with Him. Support his mother, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, do justice, love kindness, and do this all at my own expense. Wait. Can't I just have my place in the parade? I can be self-centered, especially when I do not spend enough time figuring out who I am, or whose I am and what that really means. You would think I would know by now that when *I fight authority, authority always wins.*

Later in the scriptures, Jesus give those persecuting Him a piece of truth about God's Kingdom: *"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* But they can only answer from a place of earthly perspective: *"He has blasphemed! "He deserves death." Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"* They do not know who Jesus is, they do not know who they are in relationship with, they do not know who they claim they belong to.

When I was young and naive, I never wanted to yell "crucify Him." I thought I could never, that I would never do that—not to Jesus. That was "them" I liked to think, that was "those people," that was not me. Then I came to understand that every time I chose my wants over the needs of others, every time I left undone the good I could have contributed to the world, I too was yelling "crucify Him" in my heart. It was easier to say that these people in the scripture did not really know Jesus like I know Jesus, like we know Jesus. Right? Wrong!

To illustrate this a little more clearly, let's look at Peter. Peter is Jesus' right-hand man for sure. Let's look at Peter in the scripture. *"Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." "I do not know what you are talking about." "I do not know the man." Then he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!"* and the cock crowed the third time. Wow!

Who do I think I am? Who do any of us think we are? Even Peter, with Jesus, in the flesh, having seen all the miracles, fell flat and was afraid for his life. He only thought of his immediate need for safety. We so need to be forgiven an endless amount of times—we cannot escape our nature, and frankly, I do not think God expects us to. But I do think we are expected to try. And in our trying, sometimes we do the right thing, we do follow Jesus, and we can, with God's help, put others first. But all of this starts with us, with fixing only ourselves. We can only control our responses, our actions, and with help we can claim Jesus, even when it does not feel comfortable.

Anyone can add to the din of cheers at a parade, but no one, alone, can be the hands and feet that pick up the cross and carry it for a little way through the world—we all need God's help.

As a final thought, I said something earlier that I want to clear up. In my words concerning prophets, I said, “Imagine having a direct link to God.” You do not need to imagine this. We all have a direct link to God. I choose to call that link, prayer. As we enter this Holy Week, remember to become servants of each other first. After that, hang on, fasten your seatbelts, because the ride to Easter will be bumpy at best. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Palms: Matthew 21:1-11, Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; The Liturgy of the Word: Isaiah 50:4-9a, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 27:11-54, Psalm 31:9-16