

Palm Sunday Year C 2025

We are now at the climax of Luke's rhetorical narrative. We are now at the climax of our faith narrative in the church year: Our faith forever finds its life against the context of a violent and broken world. We began, way back in Advent, with the announcement of John the Baptist's birth, and then the announcement of Jesus birth; the unfolding of a new way ahead. We heard prophecies as to what these births meant. Luke is writing at least a generation removed from the life and ministry of Jesus, and in his poetic reverie, he relies on the typology of Isaiah ... a voice, a familiar voice over the sweep of Israel's history, a voice crying in the wilderness, a voice from the margins, a voice persistent after the hearts and minds of the people Israel... The voice of the Spirit; a voice exhorting the people to make way for God's jubilee.... This kind of talk had been seen before with Moses and Elijah, the prophets of old who spoke truth to power... about power gone wrong, of greed and idolatry, and abusive self-interest... The legacy of the prophets was to speak the truth... holding the people and their rulers to account... and calling them, recalling them to the ways of God.... For Luke this is the awakening of God's Spirit, which for many Jews in his day under Roman occupation, had been silent for far too long.... The Spirit now on the move... again... moving over the face of the deep once again, bringing revolutionary change....bringing an uprising of justice and dignity.... Justice for all people; dignity for all people.

We heard the prophecy of Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaking of a radical transformation of the socio-economic world... Of a new order in which wealth is shared... in which the shamed are given their rightful dignity... She speaks of a day in which God's justice and mercy will be shared by all... She is speaking of a society in which there is no rank or class; she speaks of a community of shared abundance, and mutual respect; a community in which there are no outcasts... of a noble life for all people.... But alas, such speech inevitably falls on the willfully deaf ears of power: then... and now.

And then Luke's narrative centers on the person of Jesus, the anointed of God, the one greater than John, in the line of the patriarchs and prophets gone before... Jesus, the true human, sprung from the mythic imagination of God to embody the way to eternal life... and by eternal life, Luke is not speaking of life after death... Eternal life in the ancient world is a life brimming with meaning and purpose... of mystery and imaginative creativity... a life without disproportionate anxiety... a life suffused with the profound beauty of the created order... a life of joyful empathy with one's neighbor..... a life that is peaceful and just.... Now, not in the hereafter.

Luke's narrative has taken us along the road with Jesus and his followers... the road both literal and figurative... Literally, the road to Jerusalem, and figuratively the road of the new Exodus, the road to freedom and a noble life.... And of course the road is a recurring metaphor in art over the ages for life itself... Life as it is, fraught with

ambiguity, danger, and surprise... It is a road that defies the mapmaker's best intentions, requiring imagination and improvisation.... the road that is laced with uncertainty and contingency... and adventure.

Jesus models the way of life meant for the road: Namely, that we teach each other the sacred lore of our humanity, we recall the collective memory, the wisdom of our ancestors along the way: road-knowledge... You know the rudiments: practicing the art of healing through touch... that hospitality and welcome are rubrics to live by... that it is for our own salvation and well-being to embrace the stranger... and not just the presentable stranger... but the outcasts and the shunned and the untouchables of our world... that we are to dignify the detained and the captive, and that we are to call out evil... in particular, the staunch injustice, embedded in the institutional structures of our world.... And for Luke all of this takes place in the context of prayer... prayer the artful practice of paying enlightened attention.... These are rules of the road... the road upon which the drama of life unfolds.

The world is always what it is... And yet, we are to change the world... but Jesus changes the world one life at a time... the blind beggar... the paralytic... the centurion's slave... the widows son... the hemorrhaging woman... the boy with a demon... inviting sinners and tax collectors to break bread together..... Jesus is modelling an everyday practice... because salvation is a process, a practice up and against the abusive practices of unjust power... To save the world is to dignify a life, to consecrate a life; to make holy

the other, no exceptions... just the lives given to us along the road... The gospel writers know that there is no greater kindness than the kindness of strangers; strangers, perhaps angels, along the road the world is restored one life at a time, because each human soul in the mind of God bears the world entire.... And this practice is not about getting it perfect (that post Enlightenment neurosis)... It is about getting it **true**... and truth is the hard road, the road less travelled by, as the poet puts it, a road that is dangerous and risky... but it is the only road for us, brothers and sisters, because all of us are “marked as Christ’s own forever” and the road changes us, marks us, We will never be the same once we travel this road in earnest... Some folks of polite company may be loath to travel with us... they may not understand; they may push back... Are we prepared for that? Jesus asks his disciples that same question.

In our reading today we see that the road takes Jesus into Jerusalem, the center of the religious and political establishment, the seat of power... He and his disciples decide to enter the city as protestors, making a mockery of the pomp and circumstance that the rulers and vassals of Rome employ when they enter the city... It was a tradition in the empire that when a ruler or military hero entered a city, the people were to greet them with palm branches and cloaks, and shouts of hosanna... What we are seeing here is a community organized to call out the hypocrisy of their leaders. This is no so-called triumphal entry lauded by our tradition. Jesus and his followers are the political and spiritual resistance. And this resistance is speaking truth to power. The image is that

God's kingdom is a kingdom of the poor and the marginalized. The Pharisees are horrified, and they beg Jesus to keep quiet... but Jesus doesn't keep quiet.... He proceeds to the Temple, ground zero of Judaism, and drives out the merchants and money changers, calling them out along with the Temple cult, for their self-serving abuse of the people.... And of course this gets Jesus arrested... and railroaded through a mock trial leading to torture and death by execution

This is high rhetoric we're reading... literature meant to move us to action... inspire us to take stock... to call us to the truth.... And the rhetorical question here is: Are you willing to give your life to the way of truth? For Jesus, given the political context in which he lives, following this road will cost him his life... Prophets are never popular with the status quo, the entrenched powers that be... But that is exactly what we are being asked.... Is this Cause... Is this vision of how we live in God... Is it worth dying for? And perhaps a more profound question: **Is it worth living for?**

Dear people of God... Follow the good road, as dangerous and unwieldy as it may be... You'll find good company there... good people who have made the choice that to serve is the only thing... It will be quite the adventure... and there you'll find yourself, alive and vital, accompanied by angels, perhaps... Empty yourselves for the cause... and in the great mystery you will find courage and fulfillment... and joy.... So says the Spirit.... Silent no more... and alive once again.... And on the move.... On the move toward the great uprising happening as we speak.