

April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

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Luke 22:41-43



Passion Sunday has our readings all over the place so that we can fit as much of the Holy Week narrative into one service as possible. Because the timeline is whacked out, I'm going to rewind our story just a little bit before we move forward toward Golgotha. This is the chapter just before our Gospel reading, Luke 22:41-43: "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

I add this moment to our service because all I have been able to think about while preparing for this Sunday morning is the cacophony of Passion Sunday. By telling the entire week's story in one go, there is simply too much to pay attention to. Our bulletin asks us to march triumphantly, glory in God's vindication, confess with tongue and venerate with bended knee, then take up the cross behind Jesus. It's too much to ask in one-hour's time. It's too much to ask our tired, pandemic-recovering brains to pay attention to.

I offer Luke 22 as a friendly introduction to the steady rhythm I want us all to tune into this week. "Not my will, but yours be done," is the beat to which we triumphantly processed into this sanctuary this morning. God's will is steady. It's constant. It's consistent and persistent. It's the drumbeat by which every single event of the Passion follows. As we witness a calm, steady, knowing Jesus in Luke's account of the Passion, we witness God's will being done.

If the human drama that unfolds around the Passion is the melody and lyric of Passion Sunday's song, I do not have ears to hear them this year. The commentaries for this week's gospel want to emphasize the themes of innocence, power, human arrogance and ignorance. Luke's gospel is especially focused on making sure you know that Jesus was an innocent man when he was crucified and that this crucifixion was, ultimately, a miscarriage of justice. Scholars have spilled a lot of ink and pixels in dedication to the humans in this drama who use their power for good and evil, their behaviors only furthering endangering Jesus, bringing him to his death on a cross in front of his loved ones and devotees.

The scholars write with urgency about the human players of this climactic moment of our faith narrative as though one of those humans could have done something differently. They write as if sheer human will or singular mortal heroism could stop or detour the inevitability of Jesus's fate. And maybe that's the kind of narrative someone needs this Sunday: the narrative of one good person. One powerful person. A narrative of control and fixing. A narrative of interference or disruption. But even Jesus identifies this for what it is: illusion. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We seem to be the kind of people who cannot get behind the idea of fate. Perhaps it's too simple or intellectually lazy for some of us and therefore easily dismissed. Even though we delight in the Annunciation, all the prophecy of Advent, and all the poetry about how special, important, and fated the baby Jesus is, when the time comes for us to witness an adult Jesus as he fulfills those prophecies, suddenly we seek control. Surely someone could have saved this innocent man!

If you bring that ego, that noise, to this week, you might miss the beat in the background of the story. God's will set all of this into motion. Luke reminds us multiple times over the course of his gospel that Jesus is aware of the prophecies and teachings that declare that his death is inevitable and important. Through the machinations of so many humans: those who witnessed, those who attempted to stop it, those who attempted to accelerate it, and those who randomly participated in between, God's will is done—through them, despite them, around them. They are at once God's instruments and playthings and entities who have been brought to the right place at the right time to witness God's plans come to full fruition. God's will is the drumbeat by which every foot marched, every line was delivered, every thought was strung together, every event came and went.

In the cacophony of the Passion story as told by Luke, my brain is attracted to the calm and knowing Jesus, who turned Himself toward Jerusalem when the time came and followed the drumbeat toward His destiny. Along the way, He told everybody how this was gonna go: y'all gonna betray me, y'all gonna deny me, y'all are gonna watch me die. Luke

is not shy about showing us that Jesus had feelings about this: He savored his last moments of freedom. He wept. He asked for relief. He received help because he asked for it. He endured under extraordinary circumstances. He emptied himself upon the cross. He committed his spirit to God. He died in front of His loved ones. In Luke's gospel, there is no denial or fighting it, just a simple prayer: "If you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done."

This sermon is not full of answers. It is unsatisfying to say it's "God's will" that there is war after COVID, that there is inflation and economic uncertainty when we are just putting ourselves back together, that books are being banned and democracy is under siege and every time we feel like it's going to be ok, another pipe bursts and more must be fixed. It is unsatisfying to know that as smart as we are, as powerful as we are, as prepared as we are, as stable and sure as we are, there is still so much out of our control. It is frustrating to behold our smallness, to accept that today we've got it all in order, but tomorrow? "Yet not my will, but yours be done."

There is too much to focus on in this world, in our state, in our towns, in our households. We'll witness that as we collectively pray the Prayers of the People in a moment. That's why I'm pointing to Luke's Chapter 22, holding on to Jesus's calm and God's steady drumbeat. In Luke's gospel, Jesus doesn't lament being forsaken. Instead, he "commits [his] spirit" to God and trusts that God will do as He has promised. In a week designed to tell the noisy, messy story of your salvation one step at a time, stay focused on the basic truth: one man walked to the beat of God's drum and did so obediently until he came to death, death on a cross, where he emptied himself to God so that you might know everlasting life.

"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Amen.