

A Sermon for DaySpring
by Eric Howell
A Boiling Pot
Palm Sunday, Mark 11.1-11
March 28, 2021

The church father Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the mystery of God's coming among us, "Who, looking at the universe, would be so feeble-minded as not to believe that God is all in all . . . If then all is in him and he is in all, why blush for the faith that teaches us that one day God was born in the human condition, God who still exists in humanity?"

Christian belief in God among us is summarized and expressed through the great statements of faith. The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and others like them over the years give Christians a way to teach the basics of Christian belief, to remember them and to pray them. When we recite the Apostle's Creed for example, it's like a prayer. God, this is our confession of faith in you as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; help us live into it more and more fully.

Palm Sunday is nowhere to be found in the great confessions of faith. And that's too bad in a way because Jesus riding a donkey into the city of Jerusalem is such a profound political act of subversion. By jumping over it we lose the radical revolutionary spirit of Jesus that pervades his life and his death. We also lose the tremendous celebration. We'd all be a lot better off to have sharper instincts about Christ and the powers and to have more impulse to celebrate wildly. Palm Sunday calls us to both.

And yet, it's not there. The Apostle's Creed, as you may remember goes from "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary" straight to "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."

We skip straight from Christmas—the manger, to Good Friday and the cross; straight from the relationship that gave him life-- Mary to the relationship that gave him death—Pilate. These as you may remember are the only two people mentioned in the Creed. Jesus' mother, Mary and Jesus' executioner, Pilate.

The birth is the incarnation of the Creator into the creation, the act of God to become human that humans might be saved. Philippians 2 speaks of the humility of this act, "The Son did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

God still existing in humanity is not because his life incarnate was received happily by all. The birth of Christ already anticipates his death. It's not that Jesus wanted to die, but that he knows that his unbridled approach to human wholeness would prove too disruptive and offensive for those wielding power. Jesus chooses the path that leads to death because toning down God's healing love—to avoid death—is not an option for the Messiah. Jesus can only love wide open. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/sunday-of-the-passion-palm-sunday-2/49620>

For much of Mark's Gospel, Jesus held off provoking the wielders of power as long as he could. There's a repeated pattern where Jesus heals someone and then says 'don't tell anyone about this.' Of course, few of them listened. It's hard to blame them for their

evangelistic spirit after being healed by Jesus. Would that we all felt the same enthusiasm. He would heal someone and say 'Don't tell anyone about this.' And the next thing they did was tell people about this and about him. Because of that, word about him began to spread.

Maybe all those healed people held a kind of tension with all of this for the months and years of Jesus' ministry among them. Surely, they weren't naïve about the situation. Sitting rulers don't like at all to hear whispers of someone else winning the hearts and imaginations of the people. Those who rule with force do not like at all someone who wins by love. So, these people, they wanted to tell everyone, but he said don't tell anyone, so they just told someone, and you know how that goes.

By the time we reach the outskirts of Jerusalem, the pot is boiling.

Every morning, I heat a kettle of water on the stove for coffee. After a few minutes on the flame the pot lid starts clanging. Steam starts puffing from the spout, then the hissing, and then, if I don't get back to the stove quickly enough, the lid starts shaking. The pressure inside the pot starts to lift the lid; it starts to rattle.

Around Jerusalem, the flame of joy around Jesus had heated the pot of proclamation; the lid was rattling and so was Pilate and all the other rulers. The day had come. The lid could not be kept on the pot any longer. Here comes Jesus, and if they are silent, the rocks will cry out. They are silent no longer.

He had deeply touched the lives of so very many people. He gave people hope who had no hope; he gave healing where there were broken bodies and broken relationships and broken spirits. Imagine with me who might have been there lining the road and even hanging from the trees. The Creeds might not tell us about many people, but the Gospels do. And Palm Sunday gives us an opportunity to remember them and find our place with them.

The 12 disciples are there soaking it in. And if I'm imagining the story . . . James and John's father is there, the one they left on the fishing boat to follow Jesus. He's starting to understand why his sons said they were going to fish for people. (Mk 1)

The man is there from the synagogue in Capernaum who'd been cleaned from an unclean spirit. He's right over there, a free man. (Mk 1)

Simon's mother-in-law is there. She'd been sick and Jesus had touched her and healed her. She always had a servant's heart, and she's still serving. (Mk 1)

Former lepers are there scattered throughout the crowd. They who used to shout out: "Unclean!" now stand shoulder to shoulder with their neighbors and friends.

Remember that guy lowered through the roof of a house by his four friends. Jesus said, "Take up your mat and go home." He did. Amazing. A miracle. Look over there, and you can see one arm holding up an old mat, waving it like a trophy.

Up there is Zaccheus up in another tree. You know they say he planned to give away half of all his money. I heard once he got to half, he had so much fun doing it he just kept going.

And just now on the corner, there's comes a little girl on her daddy's shoulders. That's Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, a very important man. Or he used to be, but once he turned to Jesus for help, the other leaders threw him out. He doesn't look like he cares. His little girl was almost dead. Some say she was dead. Jesus touched her and healed her. Daddies wouldn't trade their little girls for anything.

Near him, there's a woman still clutching one little thread from the hem of Jesus's cloak.

The crowds go on and on, and their applause and smiles become one as their voices swell together, "Hosanna, save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Around the next bend there's more. Men there still with bread crumbs in their beards from the feeding of the 5000. How'd he do that? They argue about it all the time, but no one knows. There's a deaf man who has to hold his hands over his ears because he's still getting used to loud noises.

Bartimaeus is there. He was blind. Now he sees and doesn't even want to blink lest his miss something. Around him are children once turned away by the disciples, but now welcomed by Jesus. Even the disciples wink at them now as they walk by.

But we know not everyone is happy. The Pharisees are there, scowling in the shadows. We know Judas is sweating. We know the Roman soldiers across town hear the roars of the crowd and are getting rattled. They're getting their gear together to come check out what's going on. And we know that all of that converges too soon. Jesus knew it, too, but that's not for today.

You can tell the story of Jesus's life through the lives of the people whose lives were changed, theirs and ours. I hope they all were in the crowd that day. I hope he knew, and I hope he knows how deeply grateful we are for the ways our lives have been touched and healed and inspired and deepened by him, by his life, by the simple acts of love, and by all the ways he invited us to join him on his mission of redemption.

Ultimately, we come back to the word of their song: *Hosanna. Save us.* All who line the road to Jerusalem are there for their Savior. Where are you along the way? What corners of the roads? What intersection of life has brought you this moment today?

Somewhere in the crowds on the sidewalks lining a cobble-stone street, are cancer survivors and addicts, mystics and theologians, and people who have more questions than they do answers; foster kids are there and so are teenagers in love. There are people who don't know what to do with their lives. There are people who love their jobs and those who can't imagine getting up one more day to do them. There are executives; there are advocates who have a fire burning in their bones. And all are children of God, and all are pilgrims in the City of God today.

We each know why we're here. To give what little we have—a nod, a pause, a moment to whisper, "thank you." To reflect on the strange and wonderful ways that our lives have been saved and are being saved by his.

Over the hum, over the rattle, over the songs, over the heads of the children in the trees, we hear the sound we've been dying to hear, "Clip clop, clip clop" echoing through the streets and the canyons of our lives. . .coming over the rise in the road.

A voice cries out, "He's here. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

He is here.

God with us.

Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Blessed is he. Indeed.

Amen.

Copyright by Eric Howell, 2021