

Palm Sunday C 2025 Luke 19:28-40

I'm a big historical fiction fan: novels, movies, TV shows portraying any past period of history. They make me wonder, briefly, what my life would have been like if I had been born 50 or 100 or 500 years earlier. Setting aside that without modern medicine I wouldn't have made it to 40, it's fun to imagine a maid helping me into a fancy dress so I could ride in a horse-drawn carriage to a ball, while forgetting that nothing in my family's history would suggest that I'd be the rich lady in the carriage as opposed to the maid. Most of us don't want to imagine what our lives would have *really* been like before Penicillin and child labor laws and cars with heated seats. Palm Sunday tempts us with nostalgia, starting with the choice we make for how to celebrate today. The option we did *not* choose was to observe "Passion Sunday" and read the whole story of Holy Week from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem until his death on the cross. The liturgical calendar started offering that choice when attendance at Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services started to wane, and pastors didn't want to skip from Palm Sunday's parade to Easter's joy without contemplating Jesus' suffering and death in between. Speaking of nostalgia, I was rather surprised to learn that the drop in midweek attendance and suggestion to read the whole Passion on Sunday happened in the mid 50's, because I've heard my whole life that the 1950's were *the* heyday of Christianity, when *everybody* faithfully attended church... But even when we keep today as just Palm Sunday and focus only on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, tradition and nostalgia still tempt us to hear what we *think* we remember instead of what Luke says and to place ourselves in this story in a more flattering than realistic light.

We sang *All Glory Laud and Honor* this morning, because that's what we do on Palm Sunday. But Luke's gospel doesn't mention palms, or singing children, or the word *Hosanna*. Instead of vasts crowds of random onlookers joining the Jesus movement and waving palm branches in an impromptu parade, Luke portrays Jesus own disciples—more than the original twelve, but specifically those who had been following Jesus long enough to see his deeds of power—spreading their cloaks in Jesus' path as he rides toward Jerusalem on a borrowed colt. These disciples praise God, saying, *Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace and glory in heaven...* which is not the same as proclaiming peace on earth. We are used to seeing the Pharisees as antagonists because they always seem to be arguing with Jesus, but they may be trying to *help* Jesus here when they tell him to get his disciples to stop their loud shouting. The Romans aren't on the scene—yet—but a crowd of disciples shouting for a king who is not Caesar was certainly inviting the occupying government to intervene. At the same

time Jesus on his colt with his disciples is heading into Jerusalem from the East, we can imagine Pilate on his warhorse with his detachment of Roman soldiers heading into Jerusalem from the West. Rome increased military presence around the Temple during the festival of Passover because Passover had political as well as religious undertones, celebrating the historic night when Israel gained freedom from their Egyptian oppressors. It's a dangerous time for a multitude to shout their support for a grassroots king.

Jesus tells the Pharisees that even if all his disciples were silent, the stones themselves would shout out. Jesus only has to wait a few days before his disciples do become silent: instead of proclaiming his loyalty, Peter will deny knowing Jesus. When even Pilate admits that Jesus is innocent, there are no voices left to call Jesus *king* or to cry out for peace; the crowds shout for his crucifixion, and the multitude of disciples who supported Jesus on his way into Jerusalem are nowhere to be found once he is in trouble. Jesus will call himself the cornerstone that the builders reject, then cry out with a loud voice from the cross, commending his spirit to the Father. Jesus himself becomes the shouting stone when everyone else is silent. In a few short days, everything that happens in today's gospel passage gets turned upside down.

I appreciate that we take our time to dwell with the harder parts of Jesus' last days, observing the solemn traditions of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday instead of trying to squish all of Holy Week into today. But I understand why church leaders wanted to make certain nobody missed the entirety of the Passion, which I encourage you to read this week whether you are able to make it back here on Thursday and Friday or not. It's important to read the whole story, not only to see everything that Jesus does, but also to see everything that Jesus' disciples do. Jesus' disciples don't just spread their cloaks before him and shout praises to God. Jesus' disciples betray him for money. Jesus' disciples fall asleep when he asks them to pray. Jesus' disciples deny knowing him out of fear for themselves. Jesus' disciples abandon him to the mob when public opinion swings the other way. Looking back at the first Holy Week, if we're going to act out today's scene, the disciples loudly acclaiming Jesus as king, the only honest thing to do is to also place ourselves in the story as the ones who betrayed, denied, and abandoned Jesus. That is the full story of the Passion. When we celebrate Jesus' Resurrection next Sunday, we celebrate that our very worst is no match for the power of God's love. So we enter into this Holiest of Weeks, where we most certainly have a part in the story. And we give thanks to God, the Author of life, who saves us from the chapters that are hardest for us to read.