

PALM SUNDAY 2020
REFLECTION

arrival

Matthew 21: 1-11

arrival at his departure destination

humble, he rides
monarch of the margins

victor for the vanquished

Jerusalem, here I am

as cloaks cascade
and branches baste earth's bare crust
the city shakes
and even heaven trembles, quakes

and here begins the ending of the story
when shouts of 'save us' abdicate
to cries of 'save yourself'
as thorns adorn the crown, not gilded glory

how blessed is the one who comes...

from Dad and Daughter, Prayers and Poems
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Do you have a leaf
or a stick with you?
Pick it up
and hold it in your
hand.

This leaf or stick came from a place close
to you, from a growing, living tree or
bush. It's a small piece of a bigger
organism and on its own it may seem a bit
insignificant, but as a reminder of the
whole plant, it's magnificent!

So are you!

As we are gathered apart, this Palm
Sunday, we're reminded that we are all
part of the whole, the whole body of
Christ. From our lounge or kitchen chairs
we are the crowd of witnesses, shouting
Hosannas, welcoming Jesus into the city.

Today we hear the story of Jesus' entry in
Jerusalem and are reminded that it's a
forerunner to the events of Holy Week.
The beginning of the climactic last days of
Jesus and here, at the end of Lent as we
prepare to walk with Jesus to the cross
and beyond, we are offered assurance;
the ancient prophecies are being fulfilled.
We are anchored in the tradition. God is
with us.

Do you see the flow of the passage? It
begins with an intimate setting; Jesus and
the disciples. There is a 'coming near', a
sense that the destination is close, the
end of the journey in more ways than one.
They are at the Mount of Olives, and the
events of the coming days will lead to
another hill not far away. Jesus speaks
with prophetic knowledge about a
'tethered ass and foal', and we are
reminded that he is coming into a city that
'kills the prophets', with a full
understanding and awareness of what will
unfold.

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets
and stone those sent to you, how often I have
longed to gather your children together, as a hen
gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were
not willing.. Matthew 23:37*

As the scene unfolds the crowds gather,
some spreading cloaks on the road and
some waving branches, greeting the Son
of David as he enters the City of David.
Calling out to be heard and saved. And
when he enters Jerusalem the whole city
is in commotion, asking 'who is this'?

What's your answer? Who is this Jesus, acclaimed by crowds, who comes in this bewildering way, humble and riding on a donkey, bearing peace and loving-kindness? The answer in today's reading is that "he is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." What's your answer?

* (pause for thought) *

From an intimate setting, to a gathering crowd, to the whole city, there's a movement happening. Tables will be turned and there will be more intimate scenes around a table, and there will be more crowded scenes of shouting, and then it will reverse until there is a forsaken man hanging on a cross with women at his feet and bandits either side. And then.... but not yet!

Today is a day for crowds and with this global pandemic there are no crowds. No waving branches or spreading cloaks up and down the aisle of the church. No communal making crosses from palm fronds to help us through the coming week and burn on Ash Wednesday next year.

In some ways our world is like a city under siege, in lockdown against the spread of the virus. How can we span the distance between this story of wide-open gates and mass gatherings and our current reality?

See the leaf, the twig, and remember that it is part of the whole, and you are also. Each act of kindness that we offer in the name of Jesus is a waving of the palm branch, a celebration of the coming of the Messiah, the monarch of the margins. Making a phone call, lighting a candle, writing a letter, receiving a care package, praying for those close and far away, replying to an email, talking over the back

fence... are the figurative laying down of cloaks and waving of branches, paving the way for Jesus to enter into the lives of those around us. They are signs of hope. Signs that our God, who has dwelt amongst the people from before the beginning of time, continues to be with us; through the coming days of Holy Week, through the darkness and into the light, through this pandemic and into the new world that emerges after our cocooned confinement.

We are anchored in the tradition.
God is with us.

*Gratitude rises from my heart
like smoke from a candle
and drifts into your ever-open arms,
that's where I belong;
you are my God, my home,
my song and my life.
Let this gratitude rise from us all,
forming clouds of thanksgiving
above our rooftops,
because your love never ceases,
never fades, never grows weary or faint.*

