

Sermon
Palm Sunday 2019
April 14, 2019
Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker

Empty Vessels and Waterfalls

Blessed be God who animates our lives and offers us streams of living water to fill the vessels of our souls as we come alongside Jesus and walk through Holy Week. Amen

I don't know about you but I cannot participate in a Palm Sunday service of blessing and passion without taking a deep breath and hoping I am ready enough for what is to transpire in the coming week. It feels to me as though the Alleluias and palm blessing are a last cleansing breeze and foretaste of glory before being starkly interrupted and overpowered by cries of crucify him not to mention torture and excruciating pain. The irony and shadow loom. Emotions are heightened and fragile.

I briefly allow myself to wonder: am I ready! Have I "trained" and prepared during Lent as an athlete or pianist might, not so much for performance but for endurance?

I am also overwhelmed by the collapse of time. Can we really be at this point when only yesterday it seems, we cradled a blessed baby and were illuminated by a star? With the Incarnation not so far removed from the crucifixion and resurrection, it feels not only like emotions have been compressed and stretched but that inordinate stamina is needed.

But this is no athletic or artistic event, this is the trial, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Today poised with palms in hand and stirred by Luke's Passion and your own wonderful participation, we might be tempted to leave as we would a theater and show up again next Sunday when it is all over and wave flowers and celebrate the return of alleluia.

God, I believe, is asking more of us. God is asking us to show up and participate...individually and collectively. God is reminding us that everything we are, everything we have done, everything we have practiced brings us ready...to this moment. Perched in the dark ramp leading to Golgotha then to the tomb then to the rolling away of the stone, we are called to remain as the disciples were called and often disappointed, as the

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women modeled by staying, as Simon a mere passerby said yes to being called out of the crowd and carrying the cross. We are called to carry our crosses right through Holy Week, into Good Friday, that we might know resurrection anew at the dawn of Easter.

perhaps one of the benefits of the Incarnation being still stirring our hearts is that we are still familiar with the art of saying Yes as Mary did. Today we are called to say yes to Holy week. To walking with the one who comes alongside.

It is overwhelming. It is not easy, It is complicated, it is absolutely necessary for our faith that we make this journey. So today, recognizing we are tired and frightened and beaten and worn by Lent, by events in our personal and public lives, how can we take that last gasp and walk with Jesus right through to Easter.

Whenever I consider this moment and its overwhelming foreboding nature I am reminded of a meditation by Ina Gorres a Catholic writer of Austrian and Japanese descent. I read it in its entirety because it is so powerful and I cannot improve...

Holy Week is beginning again and here I am once more, feeling so unadjusted to it, so utterly inadequate. Not that heart of stone feeling. simply the sense of being completely out of proportion something momentous like Niagara Falls thundering down right beside me, and there I stand, with a thimble in my hand, and I'm supposed to dip in and collect something catch it up assimilate it reacting properly goodness knows how But if you hold a cup under a waterfall, it's not only knocked out of your hand but empty to boot. the rushing tumbling water simply rebounds the only hope of scooping anything at all is to come to the edge under a lost thin trickle. This is how it is with me I am standing as near as I can get to the cataract the thunder and roar of the water is deafening I can catch next to nothing and I know very well that one step nearer and I'll be caught up or swept away. But maybe this helpless state of just standing aside, this overpowering sense of not being able to do anything about it is the only sort of adoration I'm allowed just now. One's eyes closed turned away this too is one way of divining the immensity of this tremendous mystery, of

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paying reverence at least to something surpassing by far either comprehension or emotion. When I was young I used to fancy one could somehow match one's tiny vessel to the onrush from above by the dint of emotional wriggling and writhing.

We will not be walking alone this week. We will be on the solid ground of our being in God and being in community.

A thundering waterfall of God's grace is pouring out all the time. I believe that we are today called to the edge of that flow and meant to approach Holy Week as though we are there with our whole selves, somehow having become willing emptier vessels through Lent ready to catch some drops of the redeeming power of this love.

Not only today but ever since his birth Jesus has modeled this vessel like presence for us. He has taken on our illnesses and transgressions...on Good Friday once and for all...He has taught us to empty ourselves that we too might be filled with everlasting life. He has emptied himself that we might do so also.

As Paul reminds us in Philippians: We are here today with yet another opportunity to take on the mind of Christ. We are here today today to be first reassured that we live and move and have our being in the God who loves us eternally and completely and to find a way to come to the edge, travel along the margins this week, and collect grace in our cups.

This image inspires and empowers me. I remember that Jesus goes to the margins. That is where love meets oppression. I remember that Simon was on the sidelines and in showing up was plucked from the crowd. We are Christ's Simons.

Recall our collect for today that being given the example of Christ's humility we might walk in the way of his suffering that we too might share in the joy of his resurrection.

It is a pilgrimage. It is a process. there are no shortcuts if we desire divine transformation.

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This Palm Sunday, this beginning of Holy Week, I invite you to come to the edge. Hold your empty fragile self as you would a cup firmly yet definitively and devotedly toward the flow of God's life giving love and know that you will catch enough and that you will be caught. May this be our holy gesture, as the woman who anointed the anointed one. May this be our sacramental offering. May it sustain and nourish you through this emotional week that you might arrive at the tomb, fortified and ready to roll the stone away and open to perceive that transforming power and light of the resurrection.