

Palm Sunday
An Inward Journey Taken to Journey Forward

Faithfulness is consecration in overalls. It is the steady acceptance of the common duty and immediate task without reference to personal preferences – it is there to be done and so is a manifestation of the will of God.

Evelyn Underhillⁱ

Introduction

As we retell the story of Jesus' last days, listen. Listen. Take the story in. Chew on it. Think about where you fit into the story. Are you one of the disciples afraid and fearful or one that is ever faithful? Are you a member of the crowd adding your voice to jeers and taunts? What does it mean to be a kingdom builder in Jesus' name? What risks are we willing to take in Jesus' name?

Triumphant Entry (a cloak on the altar)

We have been on the road for ages. Jesus has been teaching and healing along the way. It has been amazing to watch the crowds gather around him and how he embraces everyone – it doesn't matter if they are dirty, or have a disease or are tax collectors or the well educated. Jesus embraces them all.

But as we get closer to Jerusalem, Jesus seems to be picking up the pace. And he must be getting tired, as he asked two of us to go into a village near the Mount of Olives to find a colt, one that had never been ridden before. His only instructions were to tell the owner, if they asked, "the Lord needs it." And surprisingly the owner let the colt go.

We threw our cloaks on the back of the colt – making a saddle for Jesus to sit on. We all started to cheer and chant as we neared the gates of Bethlehem -
'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

Not everyone appreciated our chant. Some of the Pharisees tried to silence us but Jesus ignored their request.

Litany – Waving our Palm Branches – a Parade around the sanctuary (on screen)

One Jesus rides into Jerusalem.

Many Hosanna!

One Branches are waved, people shout!

Many Hosanna!

One Hopes and dreams are running along with the parade!

Many Hosanna!

One Shout and sing for joy! The Lord comes!

Many Hosanna in the highest

One Come, now is the time of dancing and joy!

Many Hosanna in the highest!

One Now is the time of victory, for the Lord comes into our lives!

Many Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.ⁱⁱ

The Last Supper - (*bread and cup on altar*)

We arrived in the city in time to celebrate the Passover. Jesus sent Peter and John to find a man carrying a water jug, a rare site in the city. The man led us to a large room, above his home where we could hold the feast. The food was prepared and Jesus joined us at the table. He was so solemn talking about this being his last meal and about how he was going to suffer. But we didn't completely understand what he was trying to tell us.

During the idle of the meal, he stopped talking and took a cup and blessed it and passed it around the room, telling each of us to drink for the cup was about a new covenant, a covenant made possible by his blood. He then took bread and also gave it a special blessing, broke into pieces and passed it around the table telling us to eat of it as it was his body. He then told us to share the cup and bread with each other in the future, in his memory.

To add to the mystery of the evening he then tells us one of us, sitting around the table will betray. Of course we all denied it. But we also couldn't help but wonder which one of us is the guilty party.

Arrest in the Garden (*purse filled with coins*)

After we finished the Passover meal, Jesus asked us to join him in prayer on the Mount of Olives. We ventured through the city gates and found a comfortable place to sit. Jesus went off to pray and the rest of us, although well intentioned, full from dinner, fell asleep.

Every once in a while, I could hear Jesus' prayer, - something about removing the cup that had been poured for him but then something about not my will but yours. When he finished his prayer, he joined us - he was all sweaty and covered with drops of blood.

As he was scolding us about falling asleep, a crowd, lead by Judas Iscariot - the traitor, Judas came up to Jesus and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

We were all confused. Someone pulled a sword and cut off an ear of a slave. Jesus healed him and chastened even one, us and the chief priests. Jesus had been in the temple everyday since our arrival in the city - they could easily have arrested him then. But no--- they had to come in cover of darkness - they did not want the people to know what they were up to. They then cuffed him and took him away.

Peter's Denial - (*rooster*)

We were all so confused. Several of us ran away. Peter, ever so brave followed the soldiers to the home of the High Priest. There he joined others around a fire, trying to stay warm. Several people approached him - wanting to know if he was a Galilean, if he knew Jesus, if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter denied he knew Jesus three different times. Then, a rooster crowed.

Jesus had told Peter he would deny knowing Jesus and would do so 3 times before the rooster crowed. Peter, weeping because of what he had done, ran away in shame.

Jesus' Trial - (crown of thorns)

Jesus was dragged before the chief priests. As they questioned him they decided he was a threat to them and to the nation. They accused him of claiming to be a king and the son of God. Having no authority to put Jesus on trial, let alone kill him, they took him to Pilate, the Roman Governor and then to Herod, with a list of charges including encouraging people not to pay taxes, that he was a king and the Messiah.

He was mocked by the soldiers and beaten and dressed in a robe and crowned with a crown of thorns. Pilate then agreed to have Jesus flogged and released. But the chief priests were not content with just a flogging, they wanted Jesus crucified. So they worked the crowd that had gathered outside of Pilate's palace. The people started to shout – "Crucify him. Crucify him." It was deafening. It was heart wrenching. It was so hard to believe that the people who came to hear him teach were now turning against him.

So Pilate, wanting to avoid a riot, gave in to the demands of the crowd. He sentences Jesus to be crucified.

Congregational Response (on screen)

**Who was it, who for profit's gain betrayed with fond embrace,
the Lamb of God to suffer pain, enduring my disgrace?**

**Who made the crown of vine and thorn? Who placed it on his brow?
Whose angry words of mock and scorn are shouted even now?**

**Who fled the day so fearfully, and who denied their Lord?
Who chose Barabbas to go free? Who scourged Christ with the sword?**

**Have I betrayed him, mocked or fled? Have I my Lord denied?
The cross is raised, but in my stead, is Jesus crucified?**

**Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I? Am I the one to blame? Is it for me that you must die?
Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I? I am the one to blame. It is for me you chose to die.ⁱⁱⁱ**

Crucifixion - (cross)

They put a cross on Jesus' back and made him carry it to the place known as the Skull place. People had lined the streets, watching Jesus and two thieves being marched through the city streets. Women were weeping.

When they arrived at The Skull the guards nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross. They set him in the middle of the hill with a thief on either side of him.

One thief turned to Jesus, and asked to be forgiven. Somehow he recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The other thief along with the guards mocked him and told him, he was so powerful to come off that cross, to save himself. Even with all that humiliation Jesus was not vindictive. He asked God to forgive us – for we did not know what we were doing. He then told the one thief that he would be joining him in Paradise this very day.

The sky began to darken. The temperature was dropping. We gathered together, at a distance, watching this spectacle. Then Jesus cried out with his last breath, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit."

Burial - (a white cloth covers everything on the altar)

Now Joseph of Arimathea, a Pharisee and a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and requested Jesus' body. Pilate agreed and so Jesus was taken from the cross, wrapped in a linen cloth and laid in a tomb cut in the rock. The tomb was originally built for Joseph.

As the sun was setting, and the Sabbath was beginning. We sealed the tomb and the women went home to prepare spices and ointments to anoint Jesus after the Sabbath was over.

Message

Whether we like the idea of travel or not, we are all on a journey. Like all journeys this is a journey that happens in segments, in starts and stops, with many bumps along the road. We find ourselves stopping in places we hope to see and hope to be and we find we stop in places we never expected as well as in places we hoped to avoid. For our journey through life is filled with expectations and surprises, joys and sorrows, laughter and tears, robust bodies and minds, to bodies and minds that are less than robust, causing us to wonder how we ever managed to get anything done.

Our journey through life is traveled on several fronts. There is the journey of the mind, from childhood curiosity to, hopefully, wisdom in our advancing years. There is the journey of growth emotionally, physically, and socially. We build connections, we build relationship and we unfortunately we build walls. We have families, we join families, we leave families, we even create our own families as we seek to make our way in the world. And then there is the spiritual journey we are all challenged to take. This is a journey of connection with God and with each other, an inward journey of coming to know who we are, who we are called to be and whose we are. This is a journey that happens within us but manifests itself in the way we live, the way we treat each other, and the way we embrace each day God has given us.

During Lent we are purposeful in engaging in our spiritual journey, to listen to Jesus, to sit at his feet, to take in all that he says and does trying to make it our own. Our Lenten journey starts in the backwaters of Galilee weaving across the countryside to Jerusalem. Jerusalem the holy city. Jerusalem a place to celebrate the Passover. Jerusalem is also where we face the reality of denial and doubt in our faith. We wonder

if we will ever be able to carry the cross Jesus has called us to carry? We question if we are able to walk beside him as he carries the cross to his death?

And even though we are faced with the finality of death, there is hope. Hope in prophecies fulfilled, hope in knowing God is with us even as we wonder where God is in the world. For the beauty of our journey is that it does not end with Jesus' dying on the cross. It continues because we have been offered a new life in Christ, the old ways are gone and a new way is before us.

Even though our Lenten journey leads us to the future, it is ever so tempting to want to skip Good Friday. No one likes thinking about the meaning and the pain of the cross before us. Yet this is not the time to rush into Easter. Now is the time to prepare ourselves so that we are able to embrace a new world, a world where we acknowledge and cherish that we are all one in Christ. Amen

Congregational Response (on screen)

Holy God, our future is in your hands. Guide us on this journey into Holy Week and beyond, that we may be ever faithful, ever hopeful and ever loving. Broaden our perspective, that we may look for signs of life even when death is all around. Amen

ⁱ A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God, Norman Shawchuck, Rueben P. Job, eds., (Nashville; Upper Room Books, 2003), 132.

ⁱⁱ 2019Ministry Matters, "Worship Connection; Palm Sunday April 14, 2019," Nancy C. Townley, accessed online 1 April 2019 @ <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3662/worship-connection-palm-sunday-2019>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Lord, Is It I?" *Worship and Song*, (Nashville; Abingdon Press, 2011), 3080.