

**After the Silence**  
**Preached by**  
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**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**April 10, 2022**  
**Palm Sunday**

**For Reflection**

*This child through David's city  
Shall ride in triumph by;  
The palm shall strew its branches,  
And every stone shall crie,  
And every stone shall cry,  
Though heavy, dull, and dumb  
And lie within the roadway  
To pave his way to kingdom come.*

From "A Christmas Hymn" by Richard Wilbur

**Hebrew Scripture:** *Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29*

<sup>1</sup>O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! <sup>2</sup>Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." <sup>19</sup>Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. <sup>20</sup>This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. <sup>21</sup>Thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. <sup>22</sup>The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. <sup>23</sup>This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup>This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. <sup>25</sup>Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success! <sup>26</sup>Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. <sup>27</sup>The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. <sup>28</sup>You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. <sup>29</sup>O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

**Gospel Reading:** *Luke 19:28-40*

<sup>28</sup>After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" <sup>34</sup>They said, "The Lord needs it." <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" <sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." <sup>40</sup>He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

## **Meditation : *After the Silence***

As was mentioned, both of our texts today are from the lectionary's recommended readings for this Palm Sunday. The lectionary is a curious thing. Its design and purpose is to encourage the faithful to read widely from our scriptures over its three year cycle—rather than stick to a favorite few or to avoid the challenging texts. While I am not wedded to it, I do find it useful for those purposes.

The lectionary poses some other challenges as well. Occasionally, one feels a burning need to address something happening in the world. Often, even with torturous handling, the text will not yield something appropriate to a preacher's desired theme. I don't consider that a flaw in the lectionary. It encourages respect for the text. When that happens, depending on the situation, I will either depart from the lectionary or approach the matter in our prayers.

There are also days when the lectionary matches up with what is going on in the life of a congregation or the world with alarming synchronicity.

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This is not one of those days. :-)

Luke's text offers us a unique perspective on Palm Sunday. Unlike the other gospels, he does not mention palm waving or cheering crowds. Rather, Luke offers the cries of the disciples and some other disciples, but the sense is not that all Jerusalem has turned out. Even without the palms which would have been symbolic of a military victory, they are met by public reprimand—but without the imagined crowds. Beyond the parade's fringes, it is largely a silent city. Most people remained in their homes or businesses, peeking into the street if they dared look at all. Jesus' "triumphant entry" was met with the anxious silence from those who are afraid of being counted among his followers or afraid of what kind of Messiah this might be without military triumph to come—all underscored by the psychic drumbeat of impending death.

What a mis-match for where we are in our lives today. It is hard to believe, but while folks are worshipping with us virtually, this is the first time we have gathered in this Sanctuary for Palm Sunday since 2019. This silent, anxious text would have suited us much better in the intervening years—but wasn't offered then. Instead, it demands our attention this day and this year.

As is so often the case, when struggling to make scripture real in our lives and ministry, it's hard to know whose place to put ourselves in on any given day. I never put us in the place of Jesus. Our choice today is between the disciples and the silent waiting ones.

Today, we get to be the disciples. Looking back over 2000 years of history, we are free to wave palms, knowing that while Jesus' victory wasn't military, he did conquer death and fear and bring mercy and justice in ways that had never been imagined.

While we shared the anxiety of the world in response to the pandemic, our ministry was not silent during the past two years. It was different, changed indeed, but we strove to be present to one another and serve our neighbors in all the ways available to us. With creativity and imagination, we expanded the ways those ministries happened. That's who we are and who we have been and what we do and did within these walls and to a degree outside them.

But we are not done now that the silence has largely ended and life is being gradually restored. After the silence of these past two years, people who have hovered on the door sills of hope or who have withdrawn completely into bunkers of hopelessness still need us. People are looking at us to see what we will do.

The first thing they need from us is for us not to be silent. They need us to be bold and brave in the world—not to go back to "business as usual" in a forever changed world. They don't need us to sit and wait and trust that the stones will shout while bombs drop and babies die and families are gunned down in the streets and homes.

They need us to continue to rely on God's inspiring Spirit and the resulting creativity that arises in us, so that after the silence, we continue to respond and serve adaptively, honoring tradition but not being slaves to it. They need us to allow ourselves to dream new things and be energized for evolving forms of ministry powered by our God who is always doing a new thing. They need us to go into homes

and workplaces, schools and communities, not to stay here or even on the parade grounds.

They need us to proclaim with our lives and words, hands and hearts, treasure and gift the story we tell with lips and faith, promises and ritual, belief and gathered community. They need us to be in the public places “to praise God joyfully with a loud and unashamed voice for all the deeds of power that *we have seen*,<sup>38</sup> saying, ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!’” [*paraphrase mine*] They need *us* to come in the name of the Lord to where they are.

The silence of the last two years is not our greatest challenge. Our greatest challenge is what we do after that silence for the sake of those who have been left voiceless. What we do after the silence will be the most important thing we ever do.

### **Prayers for Others and Ourselves**

Loving God: As we draw near to you in prayer, we ask that we might feel your touch in the sensitive places of our lives—that both our tender joys and aching pain might know Your presence.

As we see our children take their first stumbling steps or hear them utter their first stuttering words; as they come home from school, faces aglow with a new skill acquired; as they struggle tongue between the teeth to accomplish a difficult task or weep brokenheartedly at the loss of a first love, we give You thanks, Lord. We give You thanks for these gifts among us, the children of our homes and our community of faith. We ask that in our thanksgiving, we might find the energy to reach out to all Your children in the world, that each child might live out their created potential and each parent might know the joy of seeing it. Let us identify the childlike opportunities for growth, even in those of us who are tempted to think of ourselves as all grown up. Help us to work together so that through us people will lie down in shelter, nourished with food and with a sense of Your caring presence in their lives.

Lord, even as we celebrate the growth and potential in us and all around us, we lament the limits of our abilities. We grind our teeth in frustration at bodies that no longer do what we expect; we grieve minds that no longer can name loved ones; we weep for those whose chair at our table is empty; we struggle to understand a world that prays for peace and goes to war in a hundred places; we wonder where our nation's leader will come from to help us wrestle with the enormous and complex tasks before us. Lord, fill us with Your Spirit and grant us Your strength and undergirding presence. Open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors and help us to reach out in compassion and faith. Guide us that we may look inside ourselves and at our community of faith, for the things the world needs. In all things, Lord, through us and in us, work Your purposes for wholeness and health. All this we pray in the name of Your Son, who taught us to pray together...

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day, our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil,**

**for thine is the kingdom and the power**

**and the glory forever. Amen.**