

Palm Sunday 2021, Year B
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem
March 28, 2021

After a Roman war victory, it was common for the winning General to ride with his captives and his spoils of war to the temple. The people would lay down palm branches and their cloaks, paying homage to the victorious ruler.

We joined such a parade when we gathered in the Garth a few minutes ago, except that there were no captives in our parade. There were no captives in our parade with Jesus except maybe the donkey that had never been ridden. Even at that, the donkey was borrowed for a few hours for Jesus' victory parade. Today the other captives might be those of us who feel uncomfortable marching in our ragtag parade.

Not so for the other parade taking place that day in Jerusalem, Jerusalem that had swelled from its usual population of about 50,000 to 200,000 for the festival of Passover. The "real" parade was for the Roman governor of Judea, as he made his triumphal trip to Jerusalem for the Passover. The real parade was for Pontius Pilate, and it was, in the words of Dominic and Crossan, it was a procession befitting the Roman empire:

A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. There were sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers ...

In the world of the Roman Empire, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome; he was the Son of God. Pilate's procession signaled more than a military victory and threat. It was the embodiment of a theology that worshipped "little g" gods, emperors, governors, and kings.

In our parade on the other side of town people were proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Who would notice a ragged man on a donkey and the comparatively few branches that the crowd spread? Did it even make a difference?

The word "hosanna" means, "pray, save us!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" – in the highest heaven, God, save us. Hosanna is not altogether a triumphant word, but one of hope and consternation. Hosanna! Pray, save us! Surely this Jesus was in the line of David, their Davidic King, our Savior.

We sing: "All glory, laud, and honor, to thee redeemer King!" It is blasphemy to the rulers of the day. Jesus is dangerous. The many things that he has done: healing the blind, is something that only God can do; healing on the Sabbath, turning over the tables on the Temple system; gathering with the unclean, those without voice and power ... Jesus is a threat to the Empire.

We quickly join the crowd and change our shouts from Hosanna! to crucify him! We scorn, mock, torture, and taunt our Savior and King. This is the walk of Holy Week. We are not

finished (and not made new) until we take this walk with Jesus. There is no way to Easter unless we walk through God's Friday. Finally, it will be a walk to unending light and the joy of eternal life. But we are not there yet. Walk with one another through the richness, the scandal, and the victory of this coming week.

Does our little parade make a difference? Absolutely. We are transformed by walking with Jesus. We are transformed by knowing the one God, by loving our neighbors, by participating in a crowd that knows the real victory parade is not about power but about leaning toward the mind of God, of servanthood, of love.

Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, that we might share in his glorious resurrection. Hosanna!