

Palm Sunday, 2025C
Luke 22:14—23:56
The Rev. Dr. Kathy Kelly

Last year, I invited you to check your confusion level before we started Holy Week. In my Palm Sunday sermon, I suggested that, if you do the full marathon and come to every service, which many of you do, you will be challenged, you might get tired and you might feel confused.

Palm Sunday is an amalgam of multiple liturgies. We come in singing high praises for the King and then we immediately read the passion story and are left solemn and bereft. I often call this “Schizoid Sunday” for that reason.

You are supposed to feel challenged, confused, even a little lost, maybe a bit broken. We are reenacting what the disciples went through that week of Passover which ended in the crucifixion of our Lord. And we are working to understand our own confusion and brokenness.

This morning, in case you noticed, I am preaching in the wrong time slot. The sermon usually comes after the Gospel reading. But today we are going to enjoy a dramatic reading of the Passion according to Luke together, like a play, because that is the other part of this service: Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday all rolled into one. Thanks to those of you who have agreed to help with the reading of the Passion. But we all have a part. We will *all* chime in as the “Assembly” when we get to that part that always makes us squirm a little, the part when we demand the crucifixion of our Lord.

This is a good reminder that we are all complicit in the crucifixion. There is no room for blaming others. Jesus was born for this, to die for us, a gift from God. So lean in and feel the whole of it from this moment of yelling “crucify him!” to

that moment on Saturday night and again on Sunday morning when we will shout “Alleluia!” for the risen Lord.¹

I wanted to preach *before* this reading so that we can just sit with Luke’s version of the passion story in our quiet moment before the creed. But I will say a few more things before we do that.

There are several themes in the passion which we could focus on. Since we will read it three times this week - from Mark on Wednesday’s Tenebrae service and from John on Good Friday, I will lift different themes for us as we go.

But this morning I want to mention a theme that is often overlooked, the theme of “misplaced mockery”.²

It is from Luke’s Gospel only that we know the parable of the tower-builder which is from back in Chapter 14 (14:28–30). In this less familiar parable, Jesus warns those who would follow him to count the cost. We will focus on this passage in the Fall, toward the end of Ordinary time, but it leads into this theme of mockery.

Jesus uses that parable to point out that if someone begins a construction project and then is unable to finish it, those who see the half-built structure will ridicule the lax builder. Jesus said, “ This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” This was foreshadowing in this parable from chapter 14 of the mockery aimed at Jesus during his crucifixion. (14:30).

In Luke’s Passion narrative, which we will read in a moment, Jesus is ridiculed in much the same way that it was predicted the impulsive tower-builder would have been. Those holding Jesus when he is in the custody of the chief priests ridicule him (22:63). Herod’s soldiers mock him (23:11). So also, those

¹ See Dennis Michno, *A Priest’s Handbook: The Ceremonies of the Church*, 3rd edition, 1998, section on Palm Sunday “introduction” from. p.173.

² Mary Hinkle Shore, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/sunday-of-the-passion-palm-sunday-3/commentary-on-luke-2214-2356-6>

under Pilate's command who carry out the crucifixion mock Jesus (23:36). Even one of the criminals crucified alongside him derides him (23:39).

To those on the outside of the connection Jesus has to the Father, it looks as if this Son of God didn't do his math right. It looks like the construction project of the kingdom ran over budget. Like the tower-builder of the parable from back in chapter 14, Jesus appears to have been forced to abandoned his plan partway through.

But Jesus 'own Passion prediction beginning back in the 9th chapter of Luke (9:22), along with the cool, calm demeanor that he exudes throughout the Passion story, leads us to draw a different conclusion. It's not that Jesus miscalculated the cost of faithfulness to the One whose kingdom he proclaimed, it's that he decided to pay that cost in full up front. The only hint the Passion story gives that such a decision, on Jesus 'part, was difficult is his time of prayer in Gethsemane when he considered bailing, for a moment, or so it seems. (see Luke 22:42). But again, it just seems this way. Appearances can be misleading.

The point of this Passion Sunday sermon is to remind each of us that Jesus was in control and on track with the plan all along.

So how do we respond?

Jesus tells us that if we call our selves Christians then we have to realize we are following him to the cross. His body is broken. We are broken. And only through constant prayer and forgiveness can we even begin to pursue a path of healing. Lent, which is still on all this week, is that time when we make such bold awarenesses of this reality.

In reference to another tiny and overlooked verse in our readings, the Psalmist describes our lamenting as feeling like a broken pot. (Psalm 31:12b) This brought to mind a favorite story.

It is an old story about a novice monk whose chore was to carry water. Each day he would place a large pot on each end of a pole and carry both pots with the pole across his shoulders. The water source was at the bottom of a long hill. After filling these earthen vessels, he would slowly walk back up the steep path to where he would fill the cistern.

But there was a crack in one of the pots. Each morning, when he finally reached the summit this pot would be nearly empty and he would have to return to the bottom of the hill for more water. In fact this caused him to have to work twice as much to complete his chores.

He complained to the abbot and asked for the broken pot to be replaced. The abbot denied his request arguing this was not good stewardship. The novice argued the extra work kept him from more time praying. The abbot argued that the work was also good for him.

In the end, the novice obeyed and returned to his routine.

As the seasons changed and Spring came to the monastery, many beautiful flowers grew along the path on one side. There had been no flowers here before. The extra time spent carrying water in a broken vessel had brought beauty to the path because the water that dripped all along the path as he carried it nurtured an unseen need. This delighted both the novice and the abbot.

This story reminds me that at times our brokenness carries out the beauty of the Kingdom of God in surprising ways.

We are all broken in some way and long for God to fill those broken places. But victimhood is not the best way to seek the Kingdom because the Kingdom is more about community than our individual wounds.

As we begin this Holy Week, let's remember to allow our brokenness to act as a window for the love of Christ. Let us share the work, share the healing and share in our delight of God's creation and action in the world. I believe that if we

open ourselves in this way, both as individuals and as the community that is
Nativity, that we will grow anew into a surprising beauty like that of the flowers on
one side of the monk's path.

Amen.