

## **In Our Streets**

Our text for this morning takes us back a few chapters in Mark's gospel, back to the beginning of Holy Week and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem for the first time. His arrival comes on the heels of his healing Bartimaeus outside of Jericho. He has told the disciples three times that the Son of Man will be betrayed, beaten, tortured, and killed in Jerusalem. He has told them that he will be raised to new life there as well. But Jerusalem has always been just on the other side of the horizon, a way's off. Now they are here, as are we. [Read Mark 11:1-11]

This is not the Palm Sunday we had in mind a few weeks ago, is it? There is no fanfare, no brunch, no palm parade from fellowship hall to the sanctuary. We did manage to sing "Hosanna!", but this Palm Sunday is different. I'm not leading worship from the sanctuary this week. It is quieter here, unless the dog decides to bark at a bunny in the backyard. The virus has caused and even called all of us to look at what we do and why we worship through a new lens. And providentially, Mark's text offers a more subdued Palm Sunday as well. It is a quieter text than we might be accustomed to, which is oddly fitting this year. My friend and colleague, Becca Messman notices that this palm parade does not seem to draw the masses from Jerusalem, just Jesus' followers. She also points out that after he gives the disciples their instructions, Jesus is silent for the rest of the text. He does not weep over the city or preach on the Mount of Olives.<sup>1</sup> He arrives in town later in the evening when the busy streets are hushed. He even enters the Temple in silence. He walks around and then leaves. All is quiet, at least for now.

I have been captivated by the photos of empty city streets from around the world.<sup>2</sup> Images of a deserted Times Square, a people-free Vatican Square, line up alongside landscapes of lonely fountains in Paris. Passover

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<sup>1</sup> Becca Messman in her paper for the Well, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> [https://electronicintifada.net/sites/default/files/styles/original\\_1800w/public/2020-04/200327-damascus-gate.jpg?itok=9brzO7Md&timestamp=1585771654](https://electronicintifada.net/sites/default/files/styles/original_1800w/public/2020-04/200327-damascus-gate.jpg?itok=9brzO7Md&timestamp=1585771654)  
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cultura-sites-coronavirus-pictures-1798734>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/reader-center/insider-virus-photos.html>  
<https://www.oprahmag.com/entertainment/a31958591/pope-francis-praying-alone-photo/>

begins this week, but the Old City in Jerusalem remains starkly empty and eerily quiet. Thousands streamed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday last year, following the road from the Mount of Olives into the Old City. Watching the video feels like watching archival footage from another age, another planet.<sup>3</sup> I imagine there is no massive palm parade there today. The pope is leading Palm Sunday mass alone from St. Peter's, and I am here in my McGyver-ed living room sharing worship with you. So Mark's take on Palm Sunday is particularly fitting. Yes, there are shouts of Hosanna! Yes, there are those who throw their coats and whatever branches they can find on the road, but it is not the cast of thousands I have come to imagine. The road to Jerusalem would already be crowded with pilgrims heading there to celebrate Passover, so this little parade may have blended in. It's hard to know.

So on this quiet Palm Sunday, it may be good to recall that Jesus' entry is not the production it has become in many places. If there was a loud or raucous procession heading into Jerusalem, it was likely coming from the other direction. Scholars are quick to remind us that that Rome made a point of displaying its might and power every year around Passover as a living, snorting Hollywood-sign-sized warning to anyone who might get ideas while celebrating and commemorating God's triumph over Pharaoh and their ancestors' liberation from tyranny and slavery. Rome and other despots use noise and shows of strength and bravado to assert their power. Jesus sends a couple of unnamed, unrefined disciples to borrow an unbroken colt to demonstrate his. Maybe a quieter Palm Sunday is a faithful way to go.

Don't get me wrong. I deeply miss singing "All Glory Laud and Honor" with you in the sanctuary. Heaven knows I will sing it at the top of my lungs next year and encourage you to do the same. As I mentioned a few weeks back, songs of loudest praise are fitting for this One who lays down not just a coat or a palm branch but his very life for us. That said, this year I am moved by this one who comes into town with a ragtag crowd in an improvised, under-the radar parade. And I am moved by the image of Jesus' wandering into the Temple after hours, when most of the priests have gone to supper and the pilgrims have trickled away. I imagine him reflecting on the people he has met along the way including the rich man who left disappointed, Legion who rejoiced at being freed, and the little girl Jesus raised from her death bed. I imagine him praying for

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FihgglfX-2E>

the disciples who have listened to his parables, have healed in his name, and have followed even as they ask all the wrong questions and still fail to grasp what the week ahead holds in store. I imagine him recalling what it is to be named and claimed at his baptism and on that mountain as God's beloved Son. I imagine him breathing in the power, beauty, and history within the Temple walls, this place that remains so dear to him and his ancestors even though its leaders have corrupted its calling and purpose as a place of prayer for all people. And I imagine him pausing to consider all that lies ahead for him and praying for strength and courage just as he will in that garden on Thursday night.

After I sang "Hosanna" with some of my young friends on Friday, holding a teddy bear and a paper palm branch, that song echoed in my mind for the rest of the day. And then, oddly enough a snippet of a different hymn insisted on swirling in my mind. It is not from a Palm Sunday hymn or an Easter hymn. It's from a Christmas hymn entitled, "Born in the Night, Mary's Child."<sup>4</sup> I guess it could be called a carol technically, but that sounds too loud, too brash, at least this morning. Before this week I had not noticed that this hymn is not listed in the Christmas section of the hymnal, at least not in the newest version. Instead it falls under the section of hymns about Jesus' life, which make sense because Jesus has long left the manger. His life encompasses far more than that one night long ago. And the words sing to me in a different way in this odd and surreal season:

Born in the night, Mary's Child, a long way from your home;  
Coming in need, Mary's Child, born in a borrowed room.  
Clear shining light, Mary's Child, your face lights up our way;  
Light of the world, Mary's Child, dawn on our darkened day.  
Truth of our life, Mary's Child, you tell us God is good;  
Yes, it is true, Mary's Child, shown on your cross of wood.  
Hope of the world, Mary's Child, you're coming soon to reign;  
King of the earth, Mary's Child, walk in our streets again.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A link to an anthem based on the hymn: <https://youtu.be/T8N5I0iu7Pg>  
A link to the lyrics and the melody: [https://hymnary.org/text/born\\_in\\_the\\_night\\_marys\\_child](https://hymnary.org/text/born_in_the_night_marys_child)

<sup>5</sup> *Glory to God*, #158

“Walk in our streets again,” I find myself pleading. Walk in our frightened and quiet streets, our lonely and empty streets, O Christ. Walk through frantic emergency rooms and into frightened homes of those who are suddenly unemployed; walk into every corner alongside all those who must grieve and weep and worry from afar. Walk in every place where fear, death, illness, and exhaustion hold sway. King of the earth, God’s beloved Son, Mary’s child, walk in our streets again.

And then in the quiet, something holy whispers to me and reminds me that in this and every season, he already does. Mary’s child is here in all of these places and more. And so we give thanks and wave our palms and throw down our coats and we celebrate, even if our celebrations are more muted this year. Our volume does not have to match that of years past to be fitting or faithful, nor does it need to match the bravado of the empire. Like the disciples who carry out the mundane task of securing a borrowed colt, we whisper or cry out “Hosanna! Save us!”, and we do what we can. We can stay home, make masks, call friends, write notes, weep alongside those who are grieving, and hold space for those who are afraid. We can give of our resources, speak up and out for the vulnerable. And we can pray. And by the grace of our ever-present and always faithful God, in these small ways, we will praise and point to our true King, our only Savior. Even though we are apart, together we will worship our only true Savior with mustard-seed-sized insurrections of hope. And in these acts we will be transformed into our own ragtag under-the-radar parade as we witness to the truth, the healing, the light, and the new life Mary’s Child, God’s beloved Son is bringing in our streets and everywhere even now.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.