

## **Palm Sunday Sermon for St. Luke/San Lucas 2023**

### **The Liturgy of the Palms**

- [Matthew 21:1-11](#)
- [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29](#)

### **The Liturgy of the Word**

- [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)
- [Philippians 2:5-11](#)
- [Matthew 26:14- 27:66](#)
- or [Matthew 27:11-54](#)
- [Psalm 31:9-16](#)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, Our Rock and Our Salvation. Amen.

We've done a lot in this service already so, as one of our choir members suggested, I'll get right to the point. In thinking about these passages, my mind went to Peter. Once again, he manages to put his foot in his mouth, insisting that he will never desert Jesus, that he will always be faithful. Then, when the tough moment comes, when he is challenged about his loyalty to Jesus, Peter chokes. He claims not to know Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times. And as soon as he's done it, perhaps even as he is doing it, Peter knows it is wrong. The text says, "And he went out and wept bitterly."

So, what happened? Why did Peter, the most vocal, the most rambunctious, the most out-there of the disciples, why did Peter freeze up when faced with a difficult situation? Peter is not alone. We often hear about the "fight or flight" reaction, that instinct that humans have when faced with difficult or dangerous situation, to either engage or run. But experts identify a third common reaction, "fight, flight or freeze." And many of us freeze. It's like our minds are still seeing what is happening around us, but our bodies don't move. Our mouths stop working. No words come out. We just stand there, like statues. We don't know what to say, what to do, so despite our good intentions, we do nothing. We become Peters.

I had one of those moments recently. I was worshiping with another Episcopal community. During the praying of the Psalm, the lector said that we would be praying the Psalm antiphonally (which is a fancy church way of saying alternating) by whole verse, starting with the men and then the women. I immediately felt uncomfortable. Within the group, we have individuals who are non-binary. We have individuals who are in transition, who may not feel comfortable joining in with either men or women.

As soon as I heard these words, I knew there was a problem. I could see it in the faces of some of the other congregants. Yet, in the moment, I froze. I didn't know what to do. We were in church! And we have been conditioned socially, culturally, to be respectful in church, not to cause problems. I can still hear my mother's voice in my head, telling me to "shush" when I tried to ask a question once during a service. It's just not done.

At this point, it would be lovely to bring out a list of reasons why silence was an appropriate reaction. We don't want to interrupt the service. We don't want to embarrass the lector. We can let it go now and remember to talk about it later, at a more appropriate time. We can make sure it doesn't happen again. All those culturally acceptable reasons for staying quiet, for not speaking. Yet, by not speaking, by not reacting, others were hurt. By remaining silent, it appeared that we, as a group, that I, individually, the we were okay with what was happening. It was a tough situation, and I Petered it.

The good news is that the story doesn't end there, not for Peter and not for us. Jesus still loves Peter and continues to include him in ministry. Peter goes on to serve the risen Lord, to preach and teach and lead in the church, to find his words, the ones the Holy Spirit provided, to share God's love. It was not without a cost. Tradition tells us that, ultimately, Peter and many other disciples and early followers of Christ were martyred, losing their lives for their beliefs.

I like to think that I, also, was able to make up some of the ground lost when I remained silent. I did go to the lector after, to discuss the situation. I joined in a larger conversation within the group about norms for worship, something we had not addressed previously. We were able to provide a space for those who had been hurt to speak safely, to express their responses to that moment and, together, we found alternative approaches that are more inclusive, strengthening our worship practice.

But that experience, coming as it did just as I was reading the Passion narrative, preparing for today, caused me to think about all those other times when I, when we collectively, have remained silent or, even more hurtfully, have said the wrong thing. When we have stood on the sidelines, or remained hidden in the crowd, or just walked on by. Not knowing what to say, what to do. Uncomfortable, uneasy as part of the apathetic majority.

What are those issues on which we need to speak out today? Where do we need to find a way to leave behind silence, to find our words—the Holy Spirit's words—not just to say something, but to say the right thing, the courageous thing, the loving thing? In the wake of the Nashville shooting, I feel the need to speak up about a number of things.

I need to speak up to ensure that all our transgender community members know that they are loved and accepted and included. That I stand with them during this period of increased transphobia, when hurtful comments and actions are taking place.

I need to speak up to let our kids and our teachers, our school staff and our parents, know that they also are valued members of our community. That these school shootings, that this form of violence and death, must stop. Sandy Hook, Columbine, Parkland, Uvalde and now Covenant. The list is much too long, too many lost lives, too many injured and broken people, too many kids and school staff and parents living in fear.

I need to speak up about guns. Yes, I know that it is a sensitive subject, a political subject. I grew up in a house with weapons. On my thirteenth birthday, my grandfather presented me with a hunting rifle he had constructed particularly for me, with a hand-carved stock that he had spent hours making. Walking through the woods, learning to track, with my parents, my grandparents, my uncles and aunts and cousins. This is all part of my heritage. Yet by clinging blindly to our weapons, we are putting the lives of innocent children at risk. In our silence, in my silence, I am becoming part of that apathetic majority, complicit in these deaths.

To be clear, I don't have all the answers to these deep-seated challenges. I have a feeling that, like Peter, I will likely say the wrong thing several times. In the view of some, I may even be doing that right now. But one thing I have taken away from the study of this text, at this time and in this place, is that I can no longer keep silent. I need to be able to speak, to proclaim the good news that God loves us all, and that there is a place for all at God's table, in God's house, in our community and in our lives.

And as we leave this place today, as we enter this most holy week of reflection and celebration, I invite you to join me on this journey, to find those areas, those topics, on which you can no longer remain silent, where you have been uncomfortable, fumbling for words, not knowing what to say or how to say it, to find those areas, to embrace them, to open yourselves to the Holy Spirit's working, to break the silence and let your voices be heard.

Amen.