

Palm Sunday, Year A

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 27:11-54

Today is a day of spiritual whiplash.

Today is a day when we show up, and we feel so alive.
The church grounds are lush and green.
The temperature is just right.
Spring has sprung, the sun is gold, and God is good.
It *feels* like it might as well be Easter already.

Today we show up,
and we start outside with a make-believe parade
where we sing, process, and pretend
that we were there all those years ago,
running and dancing alongside the Lord himself
as he entered the holy city of God.

But then
before we know it,
before our very eyes,
our jaunty parade
becomes a death march,
and from our own mouths
our songs turn to screams
as we bellow, "Let him be crucified!"
And they string up the Son of God,
nail him like a sack of bones,
and leave him there to die
on a splintered scaffold
made for one.

Today is a day of spiritual whiplash.

It might seem as though
there are dozens of things to say,
scores of questions to ask.
Questions about Pilate,
questions about the disciples,
questions about us.

But really,
there is only one question today—

only one thing worth asking—
and it is this:

Who is Jesus to you?

Because here's the thing.
You *could* say that Jesus was a mighty teacher,
a powerful rabbi come to free us from our ignorance,
to open our minds and to unlock the wisdom of God.
(And that would be true.)

Or you could say that Jesus was a humble servant,
a man who came to wash our feet,
to invite the riff-raff to dinner,
to level the playing field for all.
(And that would be true.)

Or you could say that he was a man on a mission,
who came to send us on a mission, too,
who came to dispatch us across the globe
to bring peace, and light, and life to all.
(And that would be true.)

All of that is true.

But there's just one problem:
It's not enough.¹

If Jesus is *only* your teacher,
if Jesus is *only* your rabbi, your guru, your guide,
if he is merely an example for you to follow,
a companion on your "journey,"
a divine mentor,
a missionary motivator,
a spiritual friend . . .
then he is not enough.

Because in *all* those cases,
it's still all about *you*.

In *all* those cases,
it's still up to *you*
to change your habits,
to master the teachings,

¹ Rutledge, Fleming. Sermon. Lenten Preaching Series. Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Columbia, SC.
<<http://trinitysc.org/about/news/march-2017/fleming-rutledge-sermon>> 29 March 2017.

to heal the wounds,
to bring peace to the world,
to get life right.

And you can't.

Even with the world's best spiritual teachings
right here at our fingertips—
even with the Master's own words
written on the flesh of our hearts
and the matter of our minds—
we are incapable of getting it right.

We are not noble.
We are not good.
We stink at being what we are supposed to be . . .
and *that* is why we're here today.
That is why our songs of "hosanna!"
shift to shouts of "crucify!"
We are no different
than we were two thousand and twenty-something
years ago.

Who is Jesus to you?
Well, I'll tell you who he has chosen to be:

Jesus is the crucified Son of God.
Jesus is the one doing the thing that you cannot do.
Jesus is the Savior of the world and of your soul.

You can try to be like him—that is good—
but that is not the point of today.
Today is not about *you* becoming like *him*;
today is about the fact
that *he* has become like *you*.
The only difference is
he's gotten it right,
and he has seen it through to the end.

That is hard news,
but it is also good news.
It is *the* Good News.

Today is a day of spiritual whiplash,
not because we've gone from a parade to a funeral,
but because the Lord our God

has lived our life,
has become obedient even to death,
and has done for us the thing that we could not.

And there is nothing left for us to do
except to shut our mouths,
stand at the foot of the cross,
and take the gift.

Amen.