

Palm Sunday, Year A

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 23:1-49

**Today is a day of contradictions
and spiritual whiplash.**

Today is a day when we show up and 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 already be Easter.

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

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, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
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 contradictions
and 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 of our ignorance,
to open our minds and give us 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,
who invited the riff-raff to dinner,
who leveled the playing field.
(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 mentor,
a 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,

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 master the teachings,
to heal the wounds,
to bring peace to the world,
to get all of 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—
we are incapable of getting it right.

We are a good people, but not always.
We are a noble people, but not always.
If we're honest, we still struggle to be
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 a mess of contradictions,
and we need help.

So 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.
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 has 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 contradictions
and spiritual whiplash,
not because we've gone from a parade to a funeral procession,

but because the Lord of life
has become obedient even to death,
and has done for us the thing that we could not.

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.