

The Humble King

The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey
Matthew 21:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
Palm Sunday – April 2, 2023

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!” That’s Matthew 21.

“He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross.” That’s Philippians 2.

The drama of this week, the drama of Holy Week, the drama of who Jesus Christ is - which means the drama of the church - is lived between those two texts.

Jesus Christ and his church live between the great authority of Matthew 21, and the humble, obedient emptiness of Philippians 2, both of them informing the other. Matthew 21 is the triumphant entrance, the exaltation of the one who will Israel, and Philippians 2 is the practice of *kenosis*, the Greek word for “emptying,” the self-emptying, surrendering, releasing, letting go, turning over, an economy of giving it all away rather than an economy of continual accumulation. Jesus Christ is a very odd king. It is because of him that true power is forever redefined as power that stands with the weak, power that supports the excluded and outcast ones, power that heals and redeems, rather than power that is interested in self-promotion.

This last week has seen yet another terrible school shooting, in Nashville. The Nashville shooting is another example of how our world is saturated with grief and loss. In our world of grief and loss, our crucified Lord stands and weeps with the victims in their loss, *and* our crucified Lord stands before and with the accused perpetrators, his heart breaking for all of them.

Our polarizing world will tell us that we have to choose sides and play favorites, but our crucified Lord stands in the places of pain and loss and brokenness and allows his own broken and crucified body to hold the tension and pain until it yields a new direction. Our crucified Lord *always* holds perpetrators of violence accountable, but that accountability, his judgment, is itself an expression of his grace. Jesus holds us accountable by enfolding us in his embrace, summoning us to the repentance that leads to life.

Jesus holds both sides of this heartbreaking and agonizing tension, and he summons his church to do the same – to stand for justice and righteousness and truth, to stand courageously against violence and meanness and oppression and intolerance,

and to do this with the warmth of God's grace that knows that people are always more than the worst thing they have done; the grace of God, whose mercy is always from everlasting to everlasting, God, whose compassion is never-ending, before whose eyes no one is better than anyone else, before whom all are beloved, and by whom all are welcome. The size of heart that is required to stand courageously with the victims of violence while sustaining an equally courageous love for those who have committed violence is almost unimaginable.

Except that we see it this week. That is the shape of the heart of Jesus, whose crucifixion places him in everlasting solidarity with the victims of oppression, and who prays, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," while he is being executed.

Jesus is the King. But he is a King like no other. For he is the Humble King. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he stands with the poor and the excluded. He calls those who are rich and powerful into his warm embrace, where they learn to let go of their tight grip on worldly wealth, just as he holds those who are poor and dispossessed in his warm embrace, where he gives them power to live and thrive with dignity and authority.

Friends, you are called to lead lives of authority and agency. You have been placed upon the earth to make an impact, to bring about change, to bring about healing and renewal and revitalization. And you are called to lead lives of humility and servanthood, looking always after the welfare of others, having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, humbled himself all the way down. Authority and humility, royalty and poverty, holiness and solidarity with sinners, standing fiercely with victims, while praying for those who have done the wrong. Let us go into Holy Week, let us keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, our Humble King, all the way through. To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.