

Good Morning! Peace be with you! How is it with your soul? It is well with my soul.

The powers-that-be in Jerusalem sat up and took notice at the actions of Jesus and the palm-waving followers on that morning. It was a show of the "power" of love and injustice for the "least of these." This procession is in stark juxtaposition to the military might of the Roman rulers. The Palm Procession was a non-violent action featuring a man sitting on a donkey — an action that has offered hope throughout the ages. The question for us is: Will we sit up and take notice of the injustice of this world and work to eradicate it in ways that honor that first Palm Sunday parade?

Let's begin with prayer. *Jesus, in your passion and resurrection, you show us there is no place you have not been and no place you fear to go. Morning by morning, you awaken us more deeply to this truth.*

As we continue to be aware of your presence especially this day and this week, keep nudging us to listen carefully for what's up. Send us into the world this day with the courage and wisdom to be faithful witnesses to your coming reign of justice, mercy, and peace. Now, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock, redeemer, and Renewer of us all. Amen.

Can you see yourself in the throng as Jesus rode past... Throwing your own cloak to pay honor to the man whose feet nearly touched the stones, waving palm branches as if the Messiah had come?

As Antuan read for us from Psalm 118, this text was used as a processional song as pilgrims approach the temple, singing about binding the festal procession with branches. There are three major festivals when all Israelites who were able were expected to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem as commanded by the Torah. Two occur in spring - Passover, and 49 days later Shavuot (literally 'weeks', or Pentecost, from the Greek); and one in autumn, Sukkot ('tabernacles', 'tents' or 'booths'). People would move from outside the Temple into the presence of God symbolized upon the altar. The people would be very familiar with the text and responses. The ceremonies were full of rituals to cleanse the temple, bowls of oil for light, water poured out with prayers anticipating the Day of the Lord when the Spirit would be poured out on all the people, and wine poured into and overflowing a bowl to mingle and flow with the water onto the altar.

Jesu is entering Jerusalem just ahead of the Feast of Passover. Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

There you are, crying out to Jesus as the anticipated messiah, coming to cleanse the temple, judge the nations, rout evil, and dwell with humanity as divine presence.

Imagine it... just as David danced before the Lord as the Ark of Covenant was carried on a beast of burden, Emmanuel...God-with-Us has arrived.

Jesus, sitting up, on a donkey. Little could the disciples and the crowds foresee that this ‘One who comes’ will suffer humiliation and death and be poured out as an offering on the altar.

The palm branches are only mentioned in John’s passage. The gospel writer goes to great lengths to help the reader know that God’s power flows through Jesus. The challenge is that this power is not the usual military, political or institutional power seen in humanity. God’s power is invisible, accomplished through obedient servanthood. Sadly, humankind will twist power to be full of sin to crucify Jesus.

The names of Pilate and Caiaphas rise up as servants of injustice and fear to keep order. The religious leaders cling to oppression and corruption to maintain their status and power with the Roman leaders and the people.

There could not be a more dramatic plot than this day of Palm Procession into a week: celebration shifting to suffering and tragedy for humanity and the Gate of Righteousness. The Gate will become condemned and humiliated. Christ’s crown of thorns and a wooden cross displays the result of sinful human power AND yet gives birth to God’s new reign into which all may freely enter.

Jesus’ procession certainly caused people to “sit up” and take notice! But what about the “sitting up” expected of Jesus? What about pondering how much courage Jesus had when he sat upright on a colt?

Have you ever had to do something that you knew would cause a stir, even if it was the right thing? I’m thinking of:

- How hard it is to have a conversation with someone whose behavior causes problems or harm.
- The challenge it can be to say **no** to getting into a car with someone that has been drinking, or taking the keys from an impaired driver.

These are just two examples when it takes courage to speak up and take action. Jesus had been the one to show a different way of living with love, kindness, and healing. He worked to right the injustice of the world.

Courage is a gift from God. It doesn't come passively; it is a choice we make. We gulp down our fear, and we step forward or sit upright, and we speak.

This passage reminds us that we follow one who kept his upright posture even while committing an act of political satire that likely would contribute to his later torture and death. If Jesus didn't sit upright and boldly, it is unlikely those "powers that be" themselves would have sat up to notice.

So here's the thing: Ordinary people doing small ordinary things can turn into big things that make a difference. Here are five examples.

- The women's Political Council in Montgomery, Alabama used talking on the telephone, printing flyers and visiting homes to organize a one day bus boycott. This led to a national civil rights movement.
- Children marching peacefully in the streets of Birmingham exposed the abuse of power when water cannons and dogs were used to stop their peaceful march.
- Microloans of \$200 empower women to own their own businesses in Africa, in India, in Central America. These small loans are more successful in addressing poverty than huge programs of national aid.
- Vacation Bible School offerings send bees, bunnies and heifers into villages through the Heifer project so families can have food and an income.
- Our Coins for Lent project will support the Tree of Life Training Center and GIVE YE THEM TO EAT program in sustainable agriculture practices, community health, housing solutions.

The question for us is: Will we sit up and take notice of the injustice of this world and work to eradicate it in ways that honor that first Palm Sunday parade?

Let me offer

A Blessing for Palm Sunday by Kate Bowler.

May it be so. Amen.

Now, Let us look to ANTUAN HAIRSTON who will lead us in the prayer for God's people.

Response to the Word –**Pastor Pat***Kate Bowler shares a blessing for this day.*

"For Palm Sunday"

Jesus, from that mountain
high among the olive trees,
it would have been an easy walk
down to the city, to Jerusalem, which lay below.

So why choose to make your way
on a donkey,
on an everyday beast of burden,
your feet almost dragging on the ground?

And who are these people running,
bending low,
to spread their precious cloaks on the road before you,
waving palm branches and shouting,
"Save us! Hosanna to the Son of David!"?
What is the raw and urgent hope
That rises in their songs?
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
And, Jesus, why are you smiling?

Because it is true what they are saying,
though they can't yet know the whole of it.
It is happening. It is unfolding in slow motion,
the fulfillment of that promise from of old:
their savior would come, humble, and riding on a donkey.

Blessed are we, on this side of history
shouting, "Come, Lord, save us too!"
We know how it ends, and still we forget
to rush toward our humble, forgettable king
and yell, "Hosanna, hosanna, our hope is in you!"

—from Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day!