

Sermon for Palm Sunday
April 13, 2025 Yr C
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Michael J. Horvath
Gospel: **Luke 22:14-23:56**

So here we are. It's Palm Sunday. That one Sunday a year when we awkwardly try to jam a parade and a funeral into the same service. Where we wave palms and shout "Hosanna!" in the same breath we say "Crucify him!" And if you're feeling the emotional whiplash of that, congratulations. You're paying attention.

We started with the happy stuff. We processed in and we all joined in this moment of joy. Jesus enters Jerusalem like a celebrity walking into a block party. People throwing down their cloaks, waving branches, shouting his name. It's one of those scenes where you can almost hear the crowd's collective breath, like something huge is about to happen. A revolution. A victory. Finally, someone is going to make things right. Get rid of the Romans. Fix the system. Give us back our power.

And then... Jesus doesn't do any of that.

Instead, he walks straight into betrayal, and suffering, and humiliation. Instead of a throne, he gets a cross. Instead of a crown of gold, he gets one made of thorns.

If you're trying to follow the plot and you feel like you missed something, you didn't. That's kind of the point.

Because here's the thing: Jesus isn't the kind of Messiah people were expecting. He's not the kind of Savior we'd vote for, or hire, or build a movement around. He's not a fixer. He's not a conqueror. He's not a superhero. He's... well, frankly, he's a letdown if what you're looking for is a god who comes in power and glory and makes your enemies disappear.

And that's where Paul comes in. Over in his letter to the Philippians, he drops this bomb of a statement—maybe one of the most beautiful and most dangerous things ever said about Jesus: "He emptied himself."

That's it. That's the whole thing. He emptied himself. He didn't cling to his divinity. Didn't flex his God-muscles. Didn't run the table. He poured it all out. He let go.

And for what? To be like us. To feel what we feel. To touch the rawness of human life. Hunger, betrayal, loneliness, pain. The whole awful and holy mess of being human.

I don't know about you, but I'm not usually a fan of letting go. I like control. I like knowing what's going to happen. I like having a plan, a backup plan, a backup backup plan, and a color-coded calendar. I'm not great at emptying myself. I'm way better at filling myself up—with opinions, with distractions, with work, with things that feed into my ego.

We live in a world that's obsessed with accumulation. We accumulate stuff, yes, but also experiences, credentials, followers, likes, praise. We are always trying to be more-- more successful, more in shape, more productive, more spiritual. And Jesus walks into the middle of all of that and says, "Actually, I'm going to be less." I'm going to let it all go. I'm going to pour myself out. Not to prove a point. Not to get attention. But to love you better. To meet you in your mess.

And that's where it gets real. Because love—real love—always involves some kind of emptying. Ask any parent who's ever held a sick kid through the night. Ask anyone who's stayed with a friend through a divorce or walked with someone through addiction. Ask the nurse who works the overnight shift or the teacher who spends their own money on crayons and snacks for their students. Love isn't glamorous. It's not efficient. It doesn't get you a bonus or a trophy. Love costs you something. Time. Energy. Ego. Certainty. It always asks you to pour something out.

And it's scary. Because once you start emptying, you don't really know when it stops. Where's the bottom? How much can I give before there's nothing left?

But in God's economy, emptying is not the end, it doesn't follow the rule of diminishing returns. In God's upside-down, totally nonsensical economy, emptying is the beginning.

That's the move. That's the big plot twist of Holy Week. Jesus empties himself... and God fills him up. He humbles himself to the point of death... and God raises him up. Not because he earned it. Not because he passed some test. But because that's just how love works in God's world.

It pours out. And then it rises.

And I think that's what we're meant to hold onto as we head into this wild week. Not some moral lesson. Not some "Jesus suffered so now you better be good" guilt trip. No. What we're holding onto is a God who doesn't stay far away. Who doesn't avoid pain or grief or betrayal or death. What we're holding onto is a God who goes all the

way down with us. Into the lowest places. Into the darkest corners. Into the shame we carry and the wounds we hide.

And there, right there, God does something miraculous. Not flashy. Not dramatic. But miraculous. God begins to raise us up. Not by snapping fingers and fixing everything. But by loving us. Right where we are. Right in the middle of our emptiness.

So yeah, this Sunday is kind of a mess. It doesn't resolve nicely. We start with hosannas and end with Jesus dead on a cross. We start with a crowd cheering and end with his friends scattered. But maybe that's the point. Maybe we're not supposed to fix it. Maybe we're just supposed to walk through it. To sit with it. To feel the weight of it.

And this year, Holy Week hits differently, doesn't it? Because the weight of it—the betrayal, the injustice, the mob turning on the truth, the innocent suffering while power protects itself—that doesn't feel like ancient history. It feels like now. Four months into this administration, and things already feel broken in new and frightening ways. The cruelty isn't subtle. The lies aren't hidden. The divisions in our country are deeper than ever, and the fear is real—especially for those who are poor, or queer, or brown, or undocumented, or just trying to get by. So maybe this year, more than most, we don't just *remember* the Passion. We *recognize* it. We see it unfolding all around us. And it hurts. And it makes us angry. And it makes us cry out, "How long, O Lord?" And the honest, uncomfortable answer of Holy Week is: long enough to feel it. Long enough to walk all the way through it. Long enough to know that God is in it.

Because this is our story, too. We know what it is to be let down, to feel abandoned, to cry out and hear silence. We know what it's like to lose. To grieve. To be misunderstood. But we also know—somewhere deep down—that love is still moving. That God is still working. That resurrection is already creeping in through the cracks.

So don't skip ahead to Easter. I mean it. Don't jump to the good news before you've walked through the hard news. Let yourself feel the tension. Let yourself be uncomfortable. Let yourself mourn.

Because when Sunday comes—*real* Sunday, resurrection Sunday—it won't be some sanitized Hallmark moment. It'll be a resurrection that knows what death feels like. A hope that was born in the dark. A joy that still has scars.

That's the Gospel. That's the good news. Not that Jesus was powerful enough to avoid the cross, but that he was loving enough to face it. Not that we get to escape suffering, but that we are never, ever alone in it.

So, as we go into this week—into Holy Week—let's carry that truth with us. Let's try to empty ourselves just a little. Of pride. Of fear. Of needing to have it all together. Let's make space for grace to fill us up.

And if you find yourself in the mess, in the pain, in the silence—remember this: that's where Jesus is, too. And love... real love... is already rising. Amen.