

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A triumphant entry, shouts of “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!,” “Savior! Save, I pray! Help in the highest!,” an entry for a king, and yet this is no king, at least not in the way we have known before or will know after. This is a king of the people, for the people, they shower him with shouts, they clear his path, it is the least that make up this great procession, it is the least that lay their cloaks across the road, that create a canopy of palms, it is the least that shout “Hosanna!”

And this triumphant entry, sets the stage. It sets the stage for what is to come this Holy Week. It sets the stage for the final confrontations, the final rebukes, the final answers that cause enough fear that those in power will conspire to end this movement before it can really begin. They will succeed at ending a life, but they will fail to end the movement. But, it is this reality of what is to come, juxtaposed with this triumphant entry, that creates two competing ideas, two competing expectations for what is to come of Jesus’ time in the holy city.

Jesus knows what is to come. And, even as he continues to pray, even as he asks God one final time if this is right for him, now, Jesus chooses to embrace the reality of what faces him. He embraces this reality and embraces that the people he serves do not get it, not yet at least. But even though they don’t get it, he will continue to teach them, he will continue to subvert the expectations, he will continue to show that his life, his ministry, his example that is left for us is not the expected path. He rides in triumphant to shouts of “Hosanna!,” and yet for him, this is his funeral procession, this is his embrace of the call that he has received from God to be the true savior, to save, now.

This is Jesus embracing the hard realities of life. This is Jesus accepting that the right thing isn't always easy, in fact more often than not the right thing is hard. The right thing demands something of us. The right thing requires us to stand against the wrong of this world. This is light shining out from the dark. This is the one beacon piercing through the overwhelming darkness that pushes in from all sides. Jesus embracing this reality, knowing what awaits him at the end of this week, is a final lesson, a final example for us to follow.

Think about it. Think about how hard it can be to do the right thing, particularly when that right thing goes against the dominant culture of your family, of your friends, of the only community you've ever known. It is heartbreaking to know that what you are standing for is right when those you have loved and trusted tell you it's wrong. It sits heavy in our stomach, the aching feeling that you know what is right and what is happening are not the same thing. This can be simple and yet so complex.

Do you let the racist or homophobic or misogynistic joke pass because it's not worth the fight or because they don't really mean it, right?

Do you take advantage of your privilege to better yourself over another, when you know that they are more deserving?

Do you fight for those whose voices are drowned out, dismissed?

You want to. I want to. But it can be so hard sometimes. It's not worth the fight. You've fought so hard for yourself. Others are better served to lend their voices. Ultimately though, we are called to do it nonetheless. We are called by Christ in this specific moment as he rides the colt into Jerusalem, to accept that we are called by God to change this world,

to right wrongs, to embrace sacrifice, to embrace the death of our self for the betterment of everyone.

Now imagine being in this crowd shouting “Hosanna!,” pleading “Hosanna!” There is a great hope that permeates throughout this crowd. This a great hope that this man Jesus has come to lead, to overthrow. But, it doesn’t play out the way these people think it will. It goes so sideways that many from this crowd will be shortly shouting “Crucify him!” just as they had shouted “Hosanna!” The hope fades. The hope is supplanted with disappointment. With fear. With mourning for what could have been. Our life is no different for having known this man, for having praised this man. Why didn’t this man save us, now?

Don’t be like the crowd. Don’t lose sight. Don’t find yourself lost in a perpetual season of Lent. Penitential, with no hope for forgiveness. Embrace instead the hope that Christ is offering. It’s not the hope that people wanted. It’s not the hope that will change things immediately. It’s not hope in anything easy. But, it is still hope. Hope that through Jesus’ embrace of his call, we are empowered in our own embracing of call. Hope that doing the hard things will be rewarded, not in any tangible way here and now, but rewarded nonetheless. Hope that if we continue to turn the hearts of the crowd onto the kind of hope that sustains, that lifts up, that carries us through, they’ll too see that their hope is misplaced, that the reality of what is being offered is so much greater than the selfish hope they have for their situation right here, right now.

We began our worship today triumphant. It is one of the only services where we actively process in song as an entire community, lifting our voices in praise and

thanksgiving. We will end our worship today solemn, in mourning, having shouted “Crucify him!” Having witnessed again to Jesus breathing his last upon the cross.

It’s fitting that we bookend our service like we do today. We come in triumphant. We hear the word as always, we share the peace, we break bread together in memory of what Christ has left for us. And then, today, we end our service a little different. There is no joyous postlude as we shake hands with one another. Instead, we end with a simple song, and leave in the quiet of what has transpired.

The space in between these two experiences of worship is where our faith lives. Our story of faith, the journeys we all are on, exists in this space between triumph and mourning. Our coming together every Sunday finds us all at some point on the spectrum between triumph and mourning. It’s why we come to church. When we are feeling the triumph, we come to be fueled in that. When we are mourning, we come to lay that brokenness here at the table. When we are anywhere in between the two, we come to find ourselves again and work towards what God is calling each of us to individually and as a collective community.

At least that has been my experience. My greatest joys have been influenced by faith, have been shared in this space, in worship. And when I am struggling, it is here I turn again. It is here I turn because I know that there are those among us who are also hurting, and together we can find camaraderie in this valley. It is here I turn because I know that there are those among us who are exalting in triumph, and together they can lead us all, lead me, up to the mountain top. Sometimes I’m the one at the mountain top and hope to help lead others to that peak, to build a lodge at the top and hang out awhile. But we can’t just stay

locked away at the top our whole life, we have to venture out into the world, and that world can't help but try and drag us down into the valley. And sometimes that world will succeed. And sometimes we will succeed in pulling others up rather than being dragged down. But we will never find ourselves forever in one place or another, and truthfully most often we will find ourselves somewhere in between, but that is why we have faith, because we know that the true mountain top awaits us, and even if we are in the deepest of valleys, there always exists a way up, and that there always are those to help us in that journey.

Our faith exists between triumph and mourning, much like Palm Sunday finds us moving from triumph to mourning over the course of one service. This day sets the table for what is to come this holy week. This day sets the table for understanding the final moments of Jesus' teaching, ministry, life. We come together shouting "Hosanna!" and we depart shouting "Crucify him!," but somewhere in between this we find our connection to Christ, we know that we are called to do good but hard things, we know that our journey of faith is expected to flow back and forth, we accept today that we have a part in this story, here, now. Embrace the reality of your experience today. Embrace where you are in your journey between triumph and mourning. And know that in and through our faith, in living into the call that is laid before us, we have companions on this journey in each other, we have strength given to us each week here at this table, know that God is with us, that God knows this day well.

Amen.