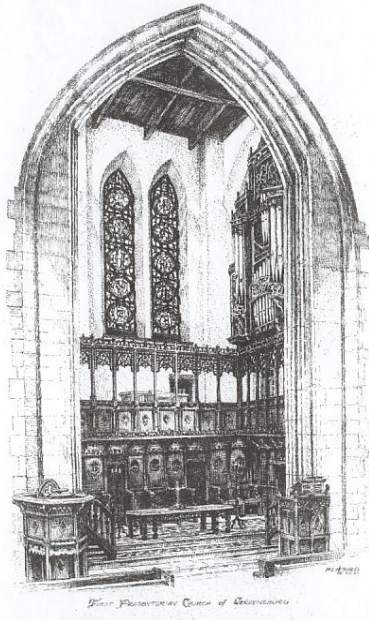


# Lowly Enough For Us

Luke 19:28-40 & Phil. 2:5-11

Palm Sunday - April 13, 2025

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We've all had the experience of having the rug pulled out from under us. We all know the feeling of having been surprised by something that has completely turned everything in our lives around and have left us all wondering just a bit about what comes next.

Anybody who has grown up in Iowa would know the name of Herb Hake. Herb was a quiet fellow who taught in the drama department of one of the state universities. He also had a side job: he produced an Iowa history program that was filmed at the university and distributed to elementary school classrooms around the state.

As a kid in school, I loved when we would watch one of his films; it got us out of the usual classroom routine and Mr. Hake was actually very interesting. He had one technique for teaching really and he would employ it with each lesson. He would start talking about some person in Iowa history, say Chief Keokuk, for whom the city is named and all the while he would be drawing something on his easel. The subject of his drawing apparently had nothing to do with the subject of his teaching, but we enjoyed watching him draw, trying to guess what it was and listening to his story about Chief Keokuk. When he was done with the drawing, it was a bowl of fruit, complete with bananas and apples and then, he would quickly turn it upside down to reveal that it really was a portrait of the great Native American tribal chief! It was always a surprise for it felt like we had been fooled just a bit.

There are other times, however, (that are not so fun as Herb Hake's show) when something happens in our lives that upsets everything and it is like the whole world has been turned upside down. In those times, we are tempted to wonder just where is this God of love that we hear of . . . where is God's mercy and care demonstrated to us in the midst of such upheaval to our lives? Where is the God who can act in a demonstrative way to put things right?

The great Presbyterian preacher, David H.C. Read, preaching on a Palm Sunday back in 1972 to his well-heeled congregation of Madison Avenue Presbyterian spoke on that topic:

**...the Christian cannot escape the question: Where is the God of love? For me the answer is not a philosophy, not a detachment. As the problem is in the end personal, so must the answer be. The divine voice mustn't be in the clouds but right there where the stones cry out. My faith must be in a God who was there, who is there, and will be there. I need a God of flesh and blood, a God with a heart that beats, a God who speaks our language in distress and in joy. He's not going to be a God I discover at the end of a chain of argument but one who awakens recognition by the compulsion of his love. He will be one lowly enough to ride into my heart on a donkey and yet with such majesty that the very stones cry out.**

Dr. Read spoke convincingly of the God whom we recognize in Jesus Christ; the God who comes to us not as the thundering conquering ruler, riding into town on a white charger, but one who comes humbly, lowly upon a donkey, greeted not by swords and red carpet, but palm leaves torn from the trees along the way and other people's dirty laundry paving his way along. This was a shocking scene indeed, for it turned the old tropes of triumphal entries on its head. This was not a saving Messiah being ushered into Jerusalem, it was the one who knew that he was on his way to death and sacrifice.

William Sloan Coffin, late-great pastor of the Riverside Church in NYC had this to say:

**The jubilant multitude fully believed that Jesus was sent by God, but they misapprehended entirely the purpose for which he was sent. The kingdom of their expectation was totally different from the kingdom**

**Jesus meant to found. His warfare was not with the legions of Rome, against whom this Jewish patriotism and indomitable courage and easily aroused enthusiasm might well count for something. His was with principalities and powers a thousand-fold stronger: the demons of hatred and jealousy, of racism and violence, of lust for money and power, of carnality and selfishness. So, though the sky on Palm Sunday seemed bright without a cloud, [Jesus] knew the throne awaiting him was a cross, that his coronation would be his brow's reception of every thorn and sting and burden that human sin had brought into the world.**

Jesus does not take Jerusalem by storm or by force. Jesus does not take the world by storm or by force. Jesus does not take our hearts and souls and minds by force. This very fact seems to have been a disappointment to Christians and the critics of Christianity alike over the centuries that have intervened between that original Palm Sunday and now. Many have determined that the Christian faith has no power connected with it, while others have found that the power of the Christian faith is seen is something quite unexpected and rather counter-cultural if we could say: humility and obedience to love seen as weakness.

Remember then, what Paul wrote to the Philippians about the purposes of Jesus Christ ...

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.**

Paul understood that in Jesus Christ God has provided a solution in his self-emptying sacrifice. Jesus does not take by force but lays down his life for us and for the life of the world.

In Jesus Christ, Paul is right to proclaim, we are called to have that same mind of his – that mind that saw that glory is not what we should claim for ourselves or seek to attain, but rather the very thing we lay down in humility and service to the one who has given his life and to the others with whom we share this life. In Jesus Christ, Paul will say, we become exactly whom God calls us to be.

And our conversion to this new way of life and being in this world is not something we do on our own, rather we do it is response to God's love for us. Karl Barth famously said:

**Our connection with the Savior is preceded by his connection with us. Our connection can only be an answer to the divine action.**

So let this old story from Palm Sunday persuade us to let us be formed by the very mind of Christ where in the appropriate approach of self-sacrifice and humility has been so plenteously illustrated to us. Let us have the mind of Christ in this rather than the mind of crowd. Let us take up the ways of God rather than insist upon our own way.

So this is really the triumph of this day, of this triumphal entry – a victory that has been won for us all and for the world; not that Jesus has taken Jerusalem by storm, but rather that we have been won to God by peace. The victory of Jesus this day is that we might be drawn into relationship with the living God; that we might know God to be the only real or true God in the myriad of lesser gods that populate human life; and, I might add, learn to love God and the ways of God in this world more than our own ways.