

**April 14, 2019 Palm/Passion Sunday**

**Luke 19:28-40, Isaiah 50:4-9a, Philippians 2:5-11**

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**Passion Readings**

(The Last Week, Borg and Crossan, esp. pages 2, 3, 216. Phrasing from my own sermon from 3-20-16 at ULCH.)

**Grace and peace to you in this holy season. Amen.**

**“So, are you all ready for Easter?”**

That’s the question the person who cuts my hair asked as I sat down this week for a trim.

I enjoy her very much. We talk openly. She knows I’m a Christian pastor.

She was trying to connect, so at least with me this question was well within bounds religiously and culturally.

I imagine it’s one she’ll ask many more times in these coming days: “Are you all ready for Easter?”

**It’s a fair question**, and would have been a lot easier to answer if I was thinking about what we’d serve for Easter dinner, or about Easter baskets and if I’d gotten jelly beans yet.

But, instead her question sent a surge of adrenaline through me.

My mind went quickly to the services coming up today, all through the week, and next Sunday.

But, really, even more, my mind went to the process of holy week—we don’t just land on Easter,

first there are...the cries of Hosanna, save us, as Jesus rides into the city,

there’s the kneeling to wash one another’s feet,

the gathering at the holy table,

First there is...the confessing our own place in the systems of death,

the yearning to follow Jesus to the cross, his body broken,

All of that flashed in front of me when she innocently, asked, “Are you all ready for Easter?”

**There’s an awful lot of “getting ready”** that happens in the Palm Sunday gospel that we heard this morning.

Go into the village. As you enter, you’ll find a colt that’s never been ridden.

Untie it. Bring it here. If anyone asks, say this, “The Lord needs it.”

There’s a precision, a planful-ness, an intentionality, an intensity, to every step in that day.

**Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan** are New Testament scholars, historians of early Christianity.

Borg and Crossan went back and pieced together the culture and the records, and found that there were actually two processions in Jerusalem that spring day that we call Palm Sunday in the year 30.

The one we re-enact with palms and Jesus riding a colt, and shouts of Hosanna—that was the peasant procession; it entered Jerusalem on the east side.

The other procession came in from the west; It was an imperial procession with Pontius Pilate flanked by columns of cavalry, marching foot soldiers, leather armor, banners, weapons clanking, drums beating.

This was the motorcade of the time ushering in Pontius Pilate (the Roman governor of Judea) arriving to keep order in the city during the Jewish festival of Passover, just like he did each year.

**Two very different processions**, but the similarities are striking, and intentional, and meant to be ironic. Jesus' procession was an alternative procession.

The imperial procession glorified the Roman Emperor, who the people worshiped with the titles savior, lord.

The other procession, the palm procession, the peasant procession, lauded this humble Jesus,  
who saves the world by dying for it,  
who liberates with justice and mercy and forgiveness,  
who loves the poor and the vulnerable,  
and who in death, emptied himself like a slave.

Dear Ones, an alternative procession of this sort doesn't just happen.

There is an awful lot of "getting ready", an awful lot of preparation, for Jesus and his followers.

### **An awful lot of preparation for us.**

Honestly, that's what I love about Holy Week: together, as a community, we don't just leap frog over these holy days, and swoop in for Easter morning and new life.

Instead, with care, with intentionality, ideally with our hearts and minds and bodies in sync, we venture to the cross, to the love.

And that's important, it makes all the difference.

Holy week bids us, come to the cross,

come to the cross that holds our brokenness and our world's brokenness,  
come to the cross where our deepest pain and shame lay bare,  
come to the cross where our control, our plans, square with God's plans, God's dreams,  
come to the cross where the world's injustice is put to death.

**As much as I believe that first Palm Sunday procession** was brilliantly planned, like the most effective protests of our day, I don't believe they were "ready" for what comes next.

How could they be?

Jesus understood, as best he could, and God-knows he'd been predicting the cross and his death.

But the disciples? I'm not so sure.

Jesus would say things in that enigmatic-Jesus-way, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground, and dies," he told them, but how could they really understand?

I guess, they really didn't need to.

Holy Week, then and now, invites us to come along, understanding or not, ready or not, to simply come.

**I'm still mulling over that question: "Are you all ready for Easter?"**

Fact is: No! I'm not ready—I don't even want to be ready.

I've got plenty of preparation to do still, that's true.

But more, before Easter morning dawns, I want to move slowly through these holy days.

I want to eat together, and with vulnerability I want to remember Jesus' last meal with his closest friends.

I want to lift before God our world,

the violence, the temptation,

the uncertainty and waiting,

all that feels hopeless and impossible.

I want to pray at the cross with you and for you, and I want you to pray for me, for one another.

I want to dare journey through this holy week, facing death, so that Easter morning is all the sweeter.

God-knows how much we need new life.

**So you're wondering how I did respond, aren't you?!**

Are you all ready for Easter, she asked.

I opted to chuckle lightly and tell her I'd be ready when it is time.

And that's the truth...I will be ready when it's time.

**Please, join me in prayer:** O Holy God, meet us on the way, ready our hearts and minds, our bodies, to meet you again this week. Bring us to the cross, and then hold us into new life. Make us ready, when it's time.

Amen.