

Forty Days  
**LEAVING THE ALTER**  
*Palm Sunday Video*

The crowd swelled with excitement  
Waiting for their newly anointed one  
Who enters into the Temple of the heart  
    We opened the gates  
    For our victor to enter  
    To welcome this the Savior-soldier  
        The warrior-king  
        The one who will liberate us from oppression and cruelty  
They yelled from the top of their lungs  
“Hosanna – Save Us!”  
From the enemies that threaten to devour us  
    “Save Us!”  
    From ourselves  
Lifting our palms to the air in celebration

I cried out from the crowds that day,  
    One voice in a sea of people  
    One among many who carpeted the ground  
    With coats and palms  
    With hopes and dreams  
        For something better in this world  
        To make of it what I will  
I placed a my passions  
Upon this teacher,  
    The Master  
        Of bread and fishes  
        Of the deaf and blind  
        Of miracles and spectacles  
But he was on a donkey  
Not a noble steed  
Who was brought down low  
    Self-giving  
    Seeking to rescue the outsider  
    To save us from our sins

“Who is this?” we questioned  
“Then who are we?” we replied  
Were we disciples following him  
On this inglorious, triumphal road

They did not turn an ear to him  
But made of their hearts a stone  
And rejected him  
    Broke him over the rock  
    Of all their hopes and fears  
        Trampled palms  
        Scattered ashes

### ***Questions for Reflection***

1. Putting yourself as a spectator to Jesus’s triumphal entry, from what would you seek liberation? What might be your expectation from this mighty “warrior-king”?
2. How have we “carpeted the ground” with our expectations of God and what God would do for us?
3. What might it mean for this warrior to ride on a donkey instead of a “noble steed”?
4. How have we, as humanity, broken Jesus “over the rock?” In what ways have we rejected Jesus’s true identity?
5. The last two verses reflect on how the “trampled palms” turned into the “ashes” of “Ash Wednesday.” What might this mean?

### **Practices of Lent**

The “Triumphal Entry” was Jesus’s entrance into Jerusalem and into the Temple. The kings of Israel, such as David, rode into town this way, especially after a successful war campaign. However, Jesus transforms this image and rides in on a donkey, a beast of burden. He is not “king” and “warrior” in the ways that they expected him to be. He would not lead a rebellion to overthrow the Roman Empire, as the Maccabees did against the Greeks. He would not rule on a kingly throne with scepter and sword. Instead he sought to conquer and rule the hearts of his people. This was the mission of Jesus’s new Kingdom.

However, the crowds could not comprehend this. They prayed for a Messiah like David and they received a teacher of non-violence. Instead of “strike down your enemies,” Jesus preached to “love our enemies.” The view of the “Kingdom of God” was not as many people expected it. Jesus had trampled on their dreams of political liberation and violent rebellion. Soon the cheer of “save us” would turn to shouts of “crucify him.” This was not the hope they were after and a price had to be paid for their disappointment.

What form would God’s deliverance and justice take? Like the time of wilderness wandering after their exodus from Egypt, God sought to conquer and rule the hearts of God’s people. The forty years in the dessert was to show them how to live in community with each other and with God. The Hebrew people were taught how to live in a world of abundance and flourishing. However, many years later, the Roman Empire reversed this training. Again, people sought their own kind of rule, their own source of provision. Many of them sought a king, a messiah, who would save them from oppression. Others, like the Sadducees, sought to maintain the power of the status quo. Still others, like the Essenes, retreated from the world to hope for their own “Teacher of Righteousness.”

It seems like today, Christians are left with those same options: to rebel against the world, to retreat from the world, to adopt the world’s system. Is there another option for the church? How might we respond to a Jesus who failed to live up to our expectations? On what are we placing our hopes and dreams? What “palms” do we need to lay down at Jesus’s feet? How can we allow Jesus to be the kind of king he came to be?

As Lent comes to a close, we have made it from the desert to Jerusalem, the great city of David. Here is where Jesus will face his worst trials. The wilderness was only a foretaste of what is to come. The shadow of the cross looms in the distance and on that hill is where this journey will take him. This is where God’s own dream is taken to be shattered on the hard hearts of humanity. May we be able to meet Jesus there.

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