

Sunday of the Passion/ Palm Sunday

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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This week, I glanced at a clergy group on Facebook. I happened to see one pastor note that they did not like Palm/Passion Sunday – that is, reading the Palm narrative and the Passion narrative on the same Sunday. This pastor didn't like the jubilant procession paired with the depressing crucifixion. And, while I personally feel it's a bit jarring, I wonder: have death and change ever been solely harmonious?

To separate them rejects the point of holding them together. The point is that Jesus's procession *and* his execution were *both* political and religious statements. In a culture where honor and shame were the social currency of the day, a procession with cloaks, branches, and shouts of Jesus being the king was the ultimate 5-star rating. However, in Luke, this political and religious march was one reason why Jesus would be arrested, tortured, and killed. Jesus's growing movement called him a king when there already was a king; Jesus's growing movement called for a change to the religious structures within Judaism when status quo benefited those in power; and, Jesus's unwillingness to silence his growing movement when directed by the authorities, these were all contributing factors to Jesus's execution. So, in my opinion, Jesus's growing movement for a coup needs to be held with the story of Jesus's arrest, trial, torture, and execution.

Today, we will hear about it from Luke's perspective. Last year, we heard Mark's account. While Luke is similar to Mark in that they both highlight Jesus' agony, suffering, and turmoil, Luke has some unique moments.

1. When they come to arrest Jesus, one of Jesus's followers will cut off a slave's ear. Then, and only in Luke, will Jesus heal the slave's ear.
2. Later in the story Jesus will be brought to trial. Pilate will pronounce Jesus innocent. Then, only in Luke, will we hear that the accusers' persistence will lead to Herod's trial. After Herod and Pilate have sent Jesus back-and-forth, we will be told that after Jesus's two enemies became friends.
3. Then, as Jesus hangs on the cross, Jesus will forgive. Only in Luke does Jesus forgive those who persecute him. Only in Luke do we hear a convict repent and Jesus promise paradise. Only in Luke do we hear a Roman centurion proclaim Jesus's innocence.

While today's passion narrative will be different from the one we hear on Friday, Luke's narrative can teach us something about our faith. Could it be that Luke's Jesus shows us how to die with dignity and bring wholeness? Could it be that Luke's Jesus will show us how to bring peace even in the midst of our own demise? Could it be that Jesus will show us how to put our faith into practice at every turn?

You see, while our world shows us that hurting another to get what you want is ethically-permissible within capitalism, Jesus will heal the slave's ear reminding us that healing comes when we care for all people without exception. While our world shows us that the political right and political left can never get along, Jesus will show us that political enemies can work together as friends. While the world shows us that some criminals are beyond hope for forgiveness and restoration, Jesus will show that it is never too late for freedom and wholeness.

So, friends, as we begin today's passion reading, we know that it is more than a story from a long time ago. Today's story is our story. It's the story of a world that presents

us with lies that we've come to embrace without question. But, it's also a story where our God reminds us that an innocent man can model healing, wholeness, and everlasting life, even while dying on a cross.