

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

March 28, 2021
Palm Sunday, Year B

The readings this week:

◦ Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 ◦ Mark 11:1-11

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

We call it Palm Sunday now.

But back then, on a Sunday two millennia ago, what kind of day dawned? The Jewish Sabbath had ended after Saturday's sun set across first century Palestine. Was Sunday a day where coolness lingered in the morning, providing a brief respite from the day's inevitable heat? Or—as women stirred to make the first trip to hoist cooking water from the wells or men grumbled while trudging toward a field to capture wandering sheep—did sweat already slick cheeks before the mean-spirited sun cleared the horizon?

A Roman Centurion gazed at the empty desert sky, wondering what Rome really looked like. He'd never been there.

The blacksmith stoked his fire. An order for nails today. Thick ones. Long ones. Damn Romans and their damn demands.

A Jerusalem shopkeeper squatted to shit, thinking he should raise his prices because the demand would be so great as the crowds increased around Passover...

Pilate awoke from another restless night. Barely shifting, for he didn't want to disturb his wife, he glanced at her. Just enough light to trace the contours of her round face. Were her eyelids fluttering? Was she dreaming her awful dreams again? She was plagued by them, and invariably shared her nocturnal dis-ease with him. Pilate's throat felt parched; too much wine last night . . . or not enough. How he hated this forgotten garbage dump of the Empire...

A mother kneaded bread in the darkness of a back room. Extra loaves were required today. Because of Passover, more family would crowd into her cramped space. She didn't know if the bloated, noisy festival pleased God, but it brought her children home. That pleased her...

Children scampered in the streets, dirt-streaked before their first meal. A dog, thin ribs exposed like a fence, gnawed at a discarded bone . . .

. . . At Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, the Nazarene slowed his ground-consuming gait and then, abruptly, stopped. I expected he'd say something to Simon Peter, who'd matched him stride for stride, or perhaps to John, a half step behind. But he gazed at me. And the disciple beside me.

“Go into the village ahead . . . and immediately as you enter it, you'll find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it. Bring it.”

His words were directed only at the two of us . . . though we'd all experienced his unsettling demands or reactions. Many had first felt wrong and yet were revealed to be so right. A few loaves of bread and fishes had fed the grumbling crowd. An impure woman (and a hundred like her) who'd demanded to be healed—and was healed. The children welcomed on his lap. The soldiers standing near lepers, married women rubbing shoulders with tax collectors, all rapt as they listened to one of his stories. So many peculiar moments; so many simple truths spoken plainly. And sometimes, such odd requests.

Without questioning, we trotted ahead for the nearby village...

We moved swiftly, puffs of dust rising from our sandals slapping the path. I wiped sweat from my brow, silent like my companion...

Then, perhaps going to the village's well, a man with a ragged scar from cheek to jaw blocked our way. “What are you doing, untying the colt?” We told him what the Nazarene had said.

“Really,” Scar Face said. “I know where I can get you a fine stallion. For a little extra, a friend of mine might let you borrow a saddle. A centurion traded it for . . . favors.” Scar Face grinned like a fox waking in a chicken coop.

“The colt's fine,” I replied. Scar Face snorted. “For a woman or child maybe...” Jerusalem lay just ahead . . .

We call it Palm Sunday now.

The beginning of Holy Week? The end of innocence? There are a thousand interpretations. Is yours right? Or is mine?...

Every day, then or now, dawns the same. The sky above lightens. Sweat slicks the brow. A blacksmith or baker works....A sleeping woman dreams, troubled by tomorrow's emptiness. A waking man frets about yesterday's sin. Children play in the streets. A dog howls.

“What are you doing, untying the colt?”

And we tell them what Jesus said, in his words and now our words, with his enduring hopes and our daily actions . . . and the journey continues. Good Friday looms. It always does. How can we possibly imagine Easter?

~ an excerpt from [Untying the Colt](#), Larry Patton



Reflecting on the Word

Word



Psalm Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

We are commanded to give thanks for his "steadfast love." Describe this term further. What is meant by steadfast love? Verse 18 says, "The Lord disciplined me severely." What does he mean by that? How can we use this truth when we are in the midst of a trial? Verse 22 is one of the most quoted Old Testament texts in the New Testament to refer to Christ. He is the ultimate fulfillment. How does this verse describe Christ? We are thankful for Christ renewing us. How does understanding our position before we are saved help us to have a more thankful attitude in this life? [Morning Star Lutheran Church](#)

Be watchful, brethren, lest the mysteries of this season pass you by without your gaining from them their due fruit. Abundant is the blessing; you must bring clean vessels to receive it, and offer loving souls and watchful senses, sober affections and pure consciences for such great gifts of grace. ... All Christians practise more than usual devotion in these seven days and try to be more humble and more serious than is their wont, so that in some sort they may share Christ's sufferings. And rightly so. For the Passion of the Lord is here in truth, shaking the earth, rending the rocks and opening the tombs; and His Resurrection also is at hand. ...

Bernard of Clairvaux 1090-1153
On Keeping Holy Week, De Passione Domini

Jesus acts - and the same Spirit that inspires his action moves in those about him, revealing to them its meaning. Simultaneously, their eyes see the Lord as he rides through the street, and their spirit sees what is behind the event. The physical eye and the spiritual are one. And those who so truly 'saw' in that hour were not the particularly talented, neither truly geniuses nor in any way the elite or the mighty, but 'the common people,' those who happened to be in the streets at the time. For the power that opened their eyes and hearts was not human power, but the Spirit of God moving among men. Indeed, it is "the little ones," possessors of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus calls them, who are particularly free and open to the workings of the Spirit, for in them it can operate untrammelled by the consciousness of their own human value. This then is God's hour; were the masses to reject it, the stones beneath their feet would proclaim the Messiah. It is the last, God-given chance.

~ Romano Guardini 1885-1968, The Lord
via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Holy God,
you have fed us all
out of your own generous and gracious hands.
From them, we have received welcome,
nourishment, hope, and consolation.
May these things grow in us,
alongside the gift of faith,
so that we may plant their seeds
in the world around us.
Through the Holy Spirit,
guide us in the week [days] ahead
to re-member our place
in your great and on-going story
of resurrection, redemption, and restoration
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

~ lutheranjulia, [RevGalBlogPals](#).

Gospel Reading: Mark 11:1-11

Think of how the President of the U.S. travels from place to place – a private high-tech airplane, soldiers, media, special cars, and so on. This entourage is not just practical – it is designed to give an impression. What message is being sent about the President himself? What message is being sent about the nation he represents? The procurement of the colt seems like a minor detail. Why do you think the Gospel writers chose to include this story before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? How would people have expected that Messiah to come into Jerusalem? Some suggest that Governor Pilate might have been making a grand entrance in Jerusalem that day as well. What kinds of things would such a grand military parade have spoken to the people of Jerusalem? In contrast, what kinds of things would Jesus' entrance have spoken to the people of Jerusalem? This was not a spontaneous gathering. Jesus made preparations (e.g., the colt), and once he arrived he turned around and left town! The parade itself was obviously an important moment for Jesus' ministry. Why? If Jesus were coming for a visit today alongside the U.S. President, how do you think he would arrive? What message would he send by his arrival? How do you think U.S. Christians would respond? [Faith Element](#)