



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Isaiah 50:4-9 NRSVUE

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
a trained tongue,^[a]
that I may know how to sustain

the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens,
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I did not turn backward.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand in court together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

Philippians 2:5-11

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⁵ Let the same mind be in you that wasⁱⁿ in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,

¹⁰ so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

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Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them

to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately."

⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶ The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Servant of servants

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

What if, for a moment, we were to let go of the holiday versions of Easter? Let go of the obsessions with peeps, baskets, eggs, bunnies, and some kickin' clothes.

In addition, what if we stop looking at a stage set for the coming passion play, the re-enactment of the crucifixion and resurrection, and focus on the brilliant satire presented by Jesus on Palm Day.

Jesus told his stagehands to enter the city and find the colt he would use to enter center stage, Jerusalem.

Not far from the neighborhood, Jesus would perform his act of subversion on a road close to where Pontius Pilate would ride into town on a war stallion. The difference for Pilate and his kingdom was to display a glamorous show of might and discourage any resistance toward his wealth extracting empire.

The powers to be, wanted to quash any hope the masses might have for an insurgence. Their show of might was energized by their own fear of losing power.

You see a life built on power, popularity, and possessions is simply a life lived to protect.

Jesus knew a powerful and free life was built on humility and vulnerability. Humility is subversive in a culture built on caste systems and exploitation. The power of coming in as Jesus did will never win a military war. It will never be able to wrest away the resources of those in power.

The colt that Jesus' rode in on would never be able to escape the speed and might of the war stallion.

But what it would do is earn the respect of all the people. It caused confusion about who they would choose to follow. A donkey riding prophet of Nazareth as they called him followed by palm wavers, or a saber-rattling fear monger, pompous Pilate.

When I imagine the comedy of a grown man riding on a colt of peace, I ask myself, "would this act of humility of Jesus cause me to go back in the house and close the door. Avoid conflict and watch a much more digestible parody of Jesus? Perhaps, an episode of "The Chosen," another parody on the life of Jesus.

As touched and entertained as I am with 'The Chosen,' it is still another passion play tugging at the heart strings and telling us what to believe instead of how to believe.

If I had to choose between a person wielding all the weapons of war offering to make me a legal citizen with an inadequate wage, a second class education system, limited health care and the protection of a strong military escort into town versus a man on a donkey who lights up with the joy of freedom and humility, I wonder if I would pick up a weapon or lay down my garment.

This powerful image presented in the liturgy of the palms asks us if we will be lured by empirical power or transformed by the power of peace.

To declare Jesus as King as he rides a donkey is meaningless. Why? Because according to the letter from Paul to the Philippians he said, "Though in very nature God, he did not see equality with God as something to be grasped but rather made himself a servant."

Not very kingly I should say.

I must ask myself, who has made the most impact on my life? Was it a war hero? Or was it Mr. Mungo, my high school teacher who broke the rules just to inspire my self-worth.

Was it a political candidate with a message for a “new tomorrow” or was it my Uncle Arthur the barber, who taught me life’s lessons while playing golf together every Monday morning.

I could go on but you might ask, what do those comparisons of mentors have to do with Palm Sunday?

They have nothing to do with Palm Sunday or Easter if you are waiting for a life of freedom granted by an empirical power that rules in you and around you. If one chooses to be enslaved by a tyrannical mind over following a liberating heart.

An authoritarian God who calls all your shots then punishes you when you “miss the mark.” Under this King we would need to fight our peers for favor.

A King George, like in the musical Hamilton, cries and threatens if we do not choose to follow them.

By following the man on the donkey, we learn to live a life of free of every sort of entanglement.

There are people who become upset when they think I am becoming political with my Touchpoint. Let me be very clear. I have no intention of getting into the political fray. But Jesus did. That is Palm Sunday.

That was the political stage where acts of humility and vulnerability were performed. It was the stage he was thrust into and the servitude he chose.

A political stage where a choice had to be made by the eyewitnesses of Jesus passing by on that donkey.

It triggered the question in all the people, “who is this?” Walter Bruggeman says it forced them and us to choose between the system of the world and the kingdom of God.

The choice is not between Kings but between kingdoms. The Kingdom or system of the world, or the “on earth as it is in heaven,” kingdom of God.

Coming after this event would be an event that would complete the seismic shift in the universe. Like an earthquake, nothing in the way of The Way would ever be the same.

Jesus was of no status at that time. He did not declare himself the new King.

Brueggemann reflects on this passage as “a moment of joy that simultaneously evokes in us a serious consideration of what it means to live under God’s rule rather than human empires.”

It evokes joy in us! Choosing to follow the way of the man on the donkey over conventional authoritarianism was subversive then and now, but it is also liberating which is what Messiah means.

Amen