

John 12:12:16; 19:16b-22
Two Contrasting Parades
WRCoB 4.10.22

Our Call to Worship is the Gospel of John's account
Of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

It's the passage that we typically read on Palm Sunday.

We usually involve children waving palm branches
And parading up and down the aisles.

It's fun!

It was fun back then too!

Why, everyone loves a parade!

The crowds surrounded Jesus and his disciples
And paraded before and after them
Proclaiming that their king had arrived!

Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Parade phraseology has changed somewhat since then.

In Biblical times, waving palms branches
Was a sign of victory

So too, were kings who rode into town on donkeys!

I don't know, just my opinion

To me, it would feel a lot more majestic
If Jesus rode in on a great white stallion!

It feels kind of like General Petraeus
At the front of a military parade on a Moped!!

The imagery doesn't quite cut it!

Anyway, the crowds were thrilled to see Jesus.

He had just come in from Bethany
After raising Lazarus from the dead!

Now that was something!

There was a miracle that they could hang their hat on!

Jesus had to be the one, the long-awaited Messiah!
The one to restore Israel to its rightful place.
The one to rid Palestine of Roman pestilence.

The people viewed Jesus as the new King of Israel
And wanted to coronate him as such.

His entry into Jerusalem was the victorious moment
They had all waited for!

Victory was just within their grasp . . .

2000 and some years later
Israel still waits for their king to arrive.

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Compare this parade, then, with the other parade.

You know, the parade that takes place on Good Friday.

The crowds were there too.

My guess, the very same people.

Like I said, everyone loves a parade!

This time, though, they didn't shout

Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

They probably shouted something similar

To the prison guard's shout in the movie, *The Green Mile*
Dead man here, dead man walking!

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The first parade; a victory march through the streets
Of the capital city, Jerusalem

And a king's return to his throne.

The second parade, another king's victory march!

This time, however, with a wooden beam on his shoulders.

This time lifted high above the city

On a cross, not a throne

Impaled not enthroned.

Two contrasting parades .

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It is rather interesting to me that John writes so little
About the second parade.

He writes simply that they took Jesus
 Bearing his own cross to Golgotha
 To the place where they crucified him.

There were two others on either side of Jesus.

Nothing more.

Maybe, it wasn't necessary to write more.

Everyone knew what happens in a scourging.

Everyone knew the horrors of a crucifixion.

They didn't need it described in detail to them.

~~

A crucifixion was a public event
 Unlike the discreet way executions are done today.

It was meant to be that way, the more, the merrier.

They wanted everyone to turn out
 As they paraded the prisoner through the streets.

They wanted nothing more than for the guilty one
 To be seen, to be mocked, to be spat upon
 To be humiliated.

It wasn't enough for the Roman authorities
 To execute someone
 In the worst possible way imaginable.

They wanted to degrade the individual
And the parade was meant to do that.

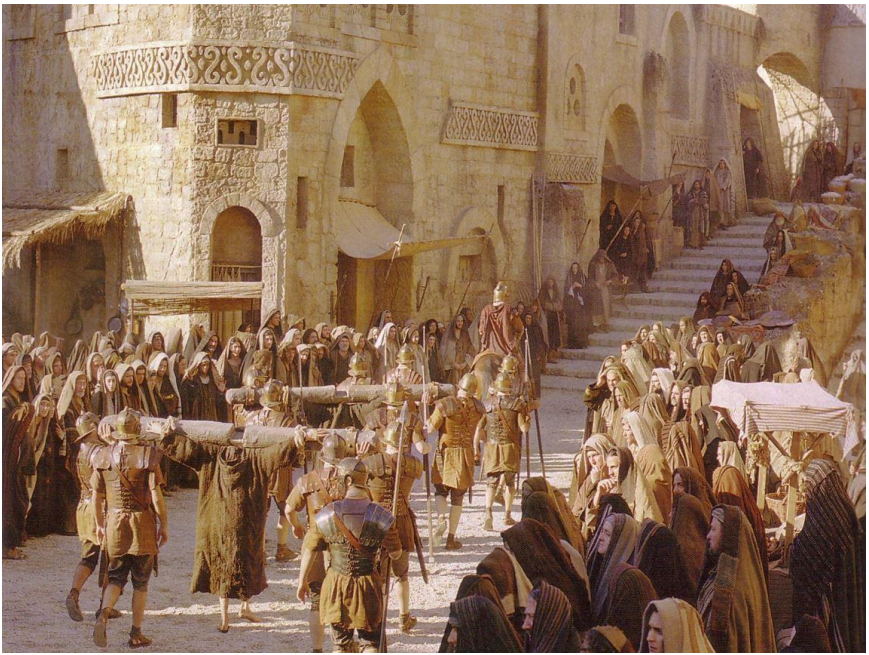
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We think of Jesus bearing a full cross over his shoulders.

But this is the wrong image.

The upright post of the cross remained firmly in the ground
At the place of execution.

Jesus carried only the cross beam.



But after a scourging like the one Jesus received
An 8X8 beam strapped across the shoulders
Was torture enough!

In the other gospels, Jesus couldn't carry the beam.

He was too beaten up.

It was given to Simon of Cyrene to carry for Jesus.

Simon, by the way, was an African
Who came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

Interestingly then, it was an African
Who, literally, was the first to bear the cross of Jesus.

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They placed a board
Around the neck of the criminal.

On it was written the crime committed.

It would later be nailed to the cross
For the entire world to see.

Pilate wrote on it; **Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.**

According to John
It was written in three languages
Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

I wonder, did Pilate write the sign sarcastically?
Or had he seen something of Jesus that convinced him
That Jesus was, in fact, who he claimed to be?
Who knows?

Pilate died a few years after the death of Jesus in 39 AD.

Some say he was executed by the Roman Emperor.

Others say he was sent into exile
Where he ended up committing suicide.

Still others believe Pontius Pilate's fate
Involved a conversion experience to Christianity.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church considers Pilate a saint!

Our passage today states
That when Pilate was told to change the sign
In protest over what he had written

Pilate responded with;
22 What I have written, I have written.

~~

They paraded Jesus down the street
To the Place of the Skull, Golgotha.
In Latin, Calvary.

Jesus wore a crown of thorns
Placed on his head earlier by Roman soldiers.

In a blog from March of 2020
Dr. Timothy Tennent
President of Asbury Theological Seminary

Makes a fascinating connection
Between the Coronavirus and Lent.

Corona in Latin means crown.

The scientists call it coronavirus because
Under the microscope it looks like a thorny crown.

Tennent writes.

One of the central symbols of Lent is the thorny crown. It reminds us of sacrifice and self-denial. It is a symbol of the cost Jesus paid . . . it is—quite literally—the thorny crown virus.

The coronavirus reminds us that as Christians we always—even when there is no virus in our midst—embody the sufferings of the world.

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Two contrasting parades.

One on Palm Sunday
The other on Good Friday.

One of exuberant joy
The other of excruciating pain.

One known as the Procession of the Palms
The other known as
Via Dolorosa, the Road of Sorrow.

And indeed, every step an agonizing one
Every step one step closer to the cross.
Every step one step closer to fulfillment.

Jesus knew what lay before him.
He predicted his suffering and death many times.

No one paid any attention.

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In his book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*
Timothy Keller wrote that during a Christian conference
On the theme of God and human suffering
A Muslim rose to speak.

*How preposterous the claim that the Creator of the universe
should be subjected to the forces of his own creation—that
he would have to eat, sleep, and go to the toilet, let alone die
on a cross.*

*It is illogical that God, the "cause of all causes" could have
pain inflicted on him by any lesser beings.*

The conference leader thanked the man
For making the uniqueness of the Christian claim
So clear, and concluded

*What the Muslim denounces as blasphemy the Christian
holds precious: God has wounds.*

~~

God in Jesus Christ entered into human suffering.

His crown of thorns, his Corona, if you will
Is found in the suffering of those affected by Covid 19.

His Corona is also found
In the suffering of the people of Ukraine
In the suffering of Judith's people in Nigeria.
In all who suffer.

As Jesus said in Matthew 25

Just as they have done to the least of these my brethren
They have done unto me, says Jesus.

~~

As a way to enhance and meditate on the Via Dolorosa
The Way of Suffering

The church, in the 13th Century
Created the 14 Stations of the Cross.

Some of the stations are based on biblical evidence
Some on Christian tradition.

I want us to walk the Stations of the Cross
As a reminder of how Jesus suffered.

And as a way to stand in solidarity with those who suffer

Via dolorosa, the road of suffering.
Jesus walked it
His disciples would have to walk it too.

Those in Ukraine are currently walking it.

Those throughout the world facing violence
Facing hunger, extreme poverty, racism
Any injustice and inequity
Are walking it too.

That we might willingly walk it too.
Via dolorosa!