

So, which one are you?

Are you like one of the many in the crowd who heard the commotion and excitement so you hopped on the Hosanna bandwagon with cries of "Save us, king Jesus!"? When he didn't save the world as everyone expected he should, did cries of "crucify him!" coming bellowing forth? The bandwagon that I'm talking about doesn't have palms though; It's the one that has exploded in full force this past year. It shouts: "Be afraid. Everyone is out to get you—to take your job, your safety, or your wellbeing. Love and mercy have limits you know." You're not sure if you really believe all of that to be true, but someone has to take the fall, right? So, it might as well be someone different from us—someone who does not look or talk or act or worship like us, someone with whom we do not know.

Maybe though, you are a bit like Judas. Of course, no one wants to admit they're like him. He's the one who stabbed Jesus in the back for the sake of a bit more pocket change. You've never done something as horrible as what Judas did, but, oh dear! Haven't you ever fallen prey to the belief that a little more money here and there will make things easier, more secure, and all-around down right practical? I mean if you don't look after yourself, who will? Who would have guessed how easier would have been to become full-time hustlers of certainty and power.

However, it might be that some of us are more inclined to connect with Pilate, the one who thought he could make the anger and clamor of the people someone else's problem, the one who tried to stay out of the conflict by not taking sides. Neutral is a good place, right?

And yet...

...Jesus said that following him would not be easy. He said it would demand that we reconsider our priorities because what is at stake is not an ideological battle but a holy war for the sake of humanity. As Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his Letter from the Birmingham Jail, it's not the rabid resister—or in his case a member of the KKK—who is most problematic. It's "the ...moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."¹ It's this exact reason that the crises of refugees are our responsibility,

¹ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *Christian Century*, June 12, 1963, <https://www.christiancentury.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/mlk-letter.pdf>.

as are the children going to school hungry each day, as are the communities whose jobs have been outsourced elsewhere with only empty smokestacks to show for it. This is more than an offering a quick handout. It's a striving and seeking that is rarely comfortable or convenient.

Now, let's not forget our pal Peter. I've always loved that guy. He's such an eager beaver—always ready to yes before he knows what he's getting into. I know I've been like him. What about you?

Have you ever been so certain about how things *will* turn out, *should* turn out, and how you will respond? It's being so confident in your faith—or rather, yourself—until something comes over you, something you cannot name. Fear. Pride. Pain.

Finally, none of us can forget Mary, Joseph, and Mary Magdalene as they weep at the foot of the cross. Maybe that is who you are this day. They don't want to say goodbye; neither do you. They can't believe this is happening to their son, their Lord, their friend; neither can you. They want to understand, but the pain, injustice, and loneliness of everyone's judgment swallows them whole. If you don't want that's like, just keep on living; you will. To lose your own flesh and blood defies words and forces you to join a club to which no one ever seeks admission and one no one can escape.

So among these folks—among Peter, Mary, Judas, the crowd, Pilate, the soldiers, and the chief priests—which one are you?

I know I've been all of them...am all of them. Just catch me on a rough day...or any day.

That's why this week is my favorite week. I hope it's yours, too. These next 7 days are both a retelling of the past and a painting of our present. They lay bare our fragility, our need, and our capacity for evil.

...and...

They gloriously array how much we are worth to God and how committed God is to this world. What happens this week: the suffering, the arrest, the meal, the death...the resurrection...are more than mere ritual or theological metaphor. They are the closing rebuttal to one of the most insidious pieces of fake news ever told—that somehow we can find our life and identity in "our wealth, position, political identity, good works, relationships or, for that matter, our limitations or life tragedies...[in] *anything* other than

God's mercy."² In order to tell this lie we love to tell, "we have to put Jesus to death" because his presence and mandate threaten our fake news.

"God won't let that be the end [though]." So, he lets us tell our lies even when it leads to his death because "that is how much God insists on being a relationship with us."³ This is what true love tastes, smells, and sounds like. It is brutal and beautiful.

Leonard Cohen wrote that "love is not a victory march; it is a cold and broken hallelujah." Although he was not referring to the mysteriousness of this week, he might as well have been... because this is how love wins. It's the only way any of us will ever win.

I'll see you on Thursday.

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² David J. Lose, "Palm/Passion Sunday A," *In the Meantime*, April 5, 2017, <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/04/palmpassion-sunday-a/>.

³ Rolf Jacobson, "Episode #533 (Sunday of the Passion Palm Sunday)," *Sermon Brainwave* (audio podcast), April 1, 2017, https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=866.