

Natalie W. Bell  
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 Palm Sunday

***Palms to Passion***  
***Selections Matthew 26-27, Philipians 2:1-11***

Today is ***Palm*** Sunday, and ***Passion*** Sunday.  
 TODAY we remember the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem  
 with palm branches waving,  
 And we remember the last days and hours of Jesus' life, his passion.

It all began with shouts of ***Hosanna!*** Hosanna in the highest!  
 And it ended on a ***cross***  
 The week went from ***Palm*** branches  
 to the ***Passion*** of his last meal, arrest, and crucifixion  
 on Sunday the crowds ***cheered*** him,  
 on Friday they called for his ***death***

We could focus only on the celebration of Palm Sunday.....  
 But today is the ***last Sunday*** we have before Easter,  
 And it really doesn't make sense for us to ***skip***  
 from the celebration of the Palms to the  
 celebration of the empty ***tomb***  
 without pausing today, and this week, to  
 remember what Jesus did for us,  
 to remember the very core of our faith!

The empty tomb isn't the same without the cross!

On ***Maundy*** Thursday we'll remember the Last Supper,  
 and how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples

But today Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday, ***sets the stage***  
 For our holiest week.  
 It's about everything that Jesus came to do---  
 And it's all foreshadowed in those ***words*** from the crowd that  
 Gathered to watch him ride into Jerusalem, shouting  
***Hosanna!*** Hosanna in the highest!  
 For Hosanna actually means "***Save us!***"

But it wasn't until he had ***breathed his last***  
 that someone finally understood that he had come to ***save us***.  
 It wasn't until that moment that we knew exactly who Jesus was---  
 and it was one of the men who had crucified him,  
 a Roman centurion who stood before the cross,

who cried out, *Truly this man was God's Son!*

To know him in that moment, to know God's Son,  
To know Jesus on the **cross**,  
Is to know the **depth of God's love**

David Johnson at Duke Divinity says,  
"We know that on the cross,  
Jesus had shown there was no dimension of human life  
he was not prepared to **reach**  
and no depth of human sin he was not committed to **redeem**".  
This cross is the key to understanding why we call this **Friday "good."** ...  
*"The Gravity of Grace", Trygve David Johnson, Duke Divinity School's Faith & Leadership, 2011*

The cross is a **symbol of Jesus' humility**  
The same humility that we are called to **imitate**.  
Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5-11:  
**3** *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*  
**4** *Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*  
**5** *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*  
**6** *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,*  
**7** *but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,*  
**8** *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.*

Wow.

Think about that **description** of our Savior.  
He came to this world as one of us, and then he **humbly gave his life** for us.  
His death on the cross saved us.  
And yet it's **so different** from the way we operate in the world today, isn't it?  
We are not humble people, are we?  
Neither were the first followers of Jesus!

In Matthew 20 the **mother of James and John** came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a **favor** of him.  
**21** *"What is it you want?" Jesus asked.*  
*She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."*

Do you know what **Jesus said**?

**22** *"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them.*  
*"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*  
*"We can," they answered.*

*23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places have been prepared by my Father."*

When they heard about this,  
the rest of the **disciples naturally became angry** with the two brothers.  
And you know what Jesus said to them?

He said,  
*"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord it** over them, and their great ones are **tyrants**.*

*26 Not so with you.*

*Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,*

*27 and whoever wants to be first must be your **slave**—*

*28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, **but to serve**....*

In Matthew 23, Jesus told the crowd,  
*but do not do as the **scribes and Pharisees** do, for they do not practice what they teach.*

*They do all their deeds **to be seen** by others;*

*6 They love to have the **place of honor** at banquets*

*and the **best seats** in the synagogues,*

*7 and to be **greeted with respect** in the marketplaces,*

*and to have people call them rabbi.*

*8 But you are ...all students...*

*11 The greatest among you will be your **servant**.*

*12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled,*

*and all who **humble themselves** will be exalted.*

When the disciples asked **who is the greatest** in the kingdom of heaven Jesus brought them a **child**, and said

*"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

*4 Whoever becomes **humble like this child***

*is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 18)*

Boy, these answers

**wouldn't get Jesus very far in our world today!**

We live in a world that celebrates **power, and pride!**

We live in a world where **self-centeredness** is practically a virtue.

We hear the slogans of our culture—and it's all about **me, me, me.**

And power?

Well, people today use **power**

exactly the way Jesus warned against in Matthew 20:

--to **lord it** over others, and act like **tyrants!**

In an article for *The Wall Street Journal*, researcher Jonah Lehrer noted that when people start to get close to the **top of any social ladder, we start acting like fools!** Some people with lots of power tend to behave like neurological patients with a **damaged [frontal lobe]**, the brain area for empathy and decision-making. Lehrer noted a study in which psychologists asked members of a "high-power group" about **speeding**. The group concluded that it was okay for them to speed, but that it was important for others to follow the posted limit. Their rationale? That powerful people are important and have a good reason for speeding! Jonah Lehrer, "The Power Trap," *The Wall Street Journal* (8-14-10)

**Jesus had more power** than anyone else on earth, being God himself, But he didn't consider that power something to be exploited. He rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. He **washed the feet** of his disciples at his last supper, He **fed** them, saying it was his own body and blood. He was **arrested, beaten, stripped, and nailed** to a cross.

Jesus was the **ultimate example** of humility, and selflessness. We hear in Philippians 2 about Jesus' **emptying** himself, **humbling** himself, becoming a servant, a slave, for all of us. Going all the way to the cross for us.

And Paul says in Philippians 2 that WE should have the **'same mind' as Christ Jesus!** We are called to the **same path** of humility and sacrifice, self-emptying, and service.

Even though such a life of humility, is pretty much the **exact opposite** of how our world teaches us to be! **So how do we do that?** What does it **mean to be humble like Jesus?**

Paul says that it's about looking to the **interest of others** before yourself. It's about seeing the power at your disposal, and **not taking advantage** of it. It's about **servicing** other people. It's about **self-emptying**.

What does it mean to **empty ourselves** for others?

In his book *The Reason for God*, Pastor Tim Keller says people show self-emptying sacrifice on a small scale in most serious love relationships.

He writes:

Consider **parenting**.

Children come into the world in ...complete dependence.

They cannot operate as self-sufficient, independent agents unless their parents give up much of their own independence and freedom for years.

If you don't allow your children to hinder your freedom in work and play at all, and if you only get to your children when it doesn't inconvenience you, your children will grow up only physically.

In all sorts of other ways they will remain emotionally needy, troubled, and overdependent. The choice is clear.

You can either sacrifice your freedom or theirs. It's them or you.

To love your child well, you must **decrease that they may increase**.

You must be willing to enter into the dependency they have so eventually they can experience the freedom and independence you have.

All life-changing love ... is ... **sacrifice**. ...

How can God be a **God of love** if he does not become personally involved in suffering the same violence, oppression, grief, weakness, and pain that we experience?

The answer to that is twofold: First, God can't.

Second, only one major religion even claims that God does. *Timothy Keller, The Reason for God (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 201–202*

God has become **personally involved** in the pain of this world, Through the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was a totally vulnerable person during Holy Week—exposing his heart, his mind, his own body and blood.

So what if following the way of humility means **vulnerability in our lives** too?

I read a funny article recently about a **Princeton professor** who decided he was tired of hearing academics brag about their work.

So, he decided to **'brag' about his failures!**

He published a resume on Twitter about his academic failures!

It includes sections titled "*Degree programs I did not get into,*"

*"Research funding I did not get" and*

*"Paper rejections from academic journals."*

**Why did he do this?**

Because he believes that projecting only success and not admitting failure has damaging effects. This assistant professor of psychology and public affairs Johannes Haushofer said, "[My] CV of Failures is an attempt **to balance the record and provide some perspective**". Marguerite Ward, "This Princeton Professor Posted His CV Of Failures For The World To See," CNBC.com (4-27-16).

Can you imagine **if we did the same thing** in our lives?

What if we're called to do this, as humble servants of Christ?  
 What if we are called to be **vulnerable, real, open and honest**?  
 Maybe not tweeting our failures,  
 but what about just **opening up** about them  
 to our brothers and sisters in Christ?  
 To the people **who are struggling** just as we are  
 with humility, and following our Savior?  
 Wouldn't that make the **church more Christ-like**?

What if we were **not thinking** about our own pride and power,  
 If we were willing to **put others first**,  
 willing **to serve**, instead of being served?

But this downward path of humility **isn't easy**, is it?  
 It IS hard to be humble.  
 I think it can **only be achieved**  
 with the **help** of the One who was true humility, don't you?

### ***So what do we do?***

How about taking the **focus off ourselves**,  
 and putting it all on our Savior Jesus Christ?

**C.S. Lewis** famously said, "*true humility is not thinking less of yourself,  
 it is thinking of yourself less*"

What if we followed Jesus' example of serving, not being served?  
 Jesus served wherever there was a need—bringing his hope, and healing, his teaching, his touch.

What if having the same mind as Christ,  
 Means that we **serve, wherever we see a need**?

Rick Warren recently told a story about **Dan Cathy, the President and CEO of Chick-fil-A**.  
 Warren and Cathy were in southern California checking on a construction site of a new  
 Chick-fil-A.

They were hungry, so they went next door to eat, to a Taco Bell.

They went in the restroom to wash up,  
 and that's when Dan took out extra paper towels,  
 and started to hand clean the sinks of the Taco Bell bathroom.

Rick Warren looked at him, and said, "Thank you for doing that."

He said, "Rick, we teach our staff to always leave any place they are at better than it was  
 when they found it, whether it's our place or not."

Dennis Gingerich, ["The Way Up Is Down."](#) Inspiring TransforMissional Living blog

We all know of similar **saints behind the scenes**,  
 Many of them right here in this church--

people who serve, and reach out, and care for others—  
without a thought for themselves, their own pride, or personal power.  
They are following Jesus' ***path of humility!***

Today you've heard the story of ***Jesus last hours on earth.***  
Talk about giving up pride, and power!  
You heard how he was arrested, beaten, stripped,  
a crown of thorns put on his head, and then he was crucified.  
Can you imagine the ***humiliation*** of that?  
And to think he endured it for us!

And the ***cross***—was a horrific method of execution,  
Can you imagine his suffering?  
Can you imagine what it took  
to become obedient to the point of death on a cross?

And the ***cross is so central*** to the life of Jesus—  
his life and ministry lead right to it.  
Without it, we don't have an empty tomb!

You know, many times Jesus tells his followers  
***Take up your cross and follow me.***  
When we come to Holy Week  
that request takes on even more meaning, doesn't it?  
What ***does it mean*** to take up our cross and follow Him?

If we look at what it meant for Jesus,  
We learn that taking up our cross is not just carrying a heavy burden...  
That's what people say—I have my cross to carry.

No, I think that taking up our cross means ***dying to ourselves.***  
It's dying to ***who we are***, and ***what we want***,  
So that we might live as who God made us to be,  
And desire what God wants for us!

Paul says it so well, *let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who humbled himself...and became obedient,  
even to the point of death on a cross.*

***With God's help*** we are called to take up our cross, die to ourselves,  
and follow Jesus' path of humility.

Hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** as you journey to the cross this week.  
For this Holy Week, from the palms to the passion,  
Is a story of humility, self-emptying, service, and sacrifice.

It is *Jesus' story*.  
It is also *our story*.

May God give us the *same mind* as Christ Jesus,  
May we *follow the path* of humility and service,  
*All the way to the cross, and beyond.*

Amen.