

Sermon 10 April 2022
Palm Sunday
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Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." (Psalm 118:22)

"If these ones were silent the stones of the fields would cry out" (Luke 19:40)

"Therefore God also highly exalted him" Philippians 2

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. Our readings for today invite us to enter the mind of Christ, to contemplate what it means to call Christ our Lord and Saviour in our world today.

Saint Paul calls the church in Philippi to be of the same mind as Christ. This means to seek understanding of how his incarnation connects us to the eternal and boundless truth of God. I will share some thoughts on the meaning of Paul's glorious hymn to the selfless vision of salvation through Christ, and then explore how this mindset described by Paul helps us to imagine what Christ was thinking as he rode on the donkey down from the Mount of Olives on the road that would lead him to the cross and resurrection.

Charles Wesley wrote in the great Methodist hymn *And Can It Be* that Christ emptied himself of all but love, expressing how the immense and free grace of God serves to save the world. This idea of self-emptying comes from our Philippians text. In Greek, the word for emptying is *kenosis*, indicating the extraordinary selfless identity seen in Christ, the paradox Christ expressed when he said those who seek to save their life will lose it. Known as *kenotic theology*, the message is that our salvation requires a capacity to empty any sense of personal ego desire. Instead, we need a complete identification with the will of God, living for the good of the world.

The psychologist Carl Jung described the process of coming to maturity through the idea of individuation, in a way that helps to explain this *kenotic theology*. Maturity in this sense means becoming who we really are, finding our true identity, integrating our conscious ego with our unconscious soul. The immature mind identifies only with the personal conscious desires of the ego, failing to see that our personal identity is constituted by a greater web of relationships and connections that reach into the past and future. This realisation of how our immediate visible reality is entirely embedded in a complex unseen web of historical and social and cultural and physical context enables the 'self-emptying' that achieved its sublime example in the life of Christ and his ethic of divine love. Individuation in this sense recognises that we are our context, leading to the ultimate enlightened realisation that all is one. Genuine maturity overcomes the delusions of the ego in order to find the path toward identification with our real self, our soul.

Integrating the ego and the soul brings material into conscious awareness that has been repressed into the unconscious. This psychological process of individuation can be supported by influences that appear through emotion, symbol and conscience. Ideas that we do not fully understand can have immense cultural importance. For example in Australia, recognition of indigenous identity involves the partly unconscious awareness of collective guilt about the ignorant destruction of the complex ancient cultures that nurtured this land

for tens of thousands of years, and the moral urgency of respect and reconciliation. Emerging cultural identity recognises that humanity is part of the earth, and that traditions that separate culture from nature have done traumatic violence to our soul and our world. Our emerging sense of the sacred sees the presence of God within nature, with human spirituality expressing wonder and awe and reverence for the complex divine order of our universe.

The existential philosopher Martin Heidegger described the achievement of authentic personal identity in terms of free projection upon our future possibilities and potential, freely imagining who we can become. In approaching such pure existential freedom, we recognise that we are thrown into a finite factual world, and that expressing who we really are, what Jung called individuation, is our ultimate purpose in life. This model of existential freedom is not about arbitrary whims and caprice. Rather, authentic existential freedom is about a shared recognition of historical necessity, living in community in an honest and open way.

We find our real identity in the ethical potential emerging from recognition of our complex historical context. Against the modern syndrome that identifies the self only with the desires of the conscious ego, this existential model of the self sees the meaning of being in terms of relationships of care. To say our personal identity is constituted by care defines our existence through relationships of concern and devotion, constructed in cultural values that connect us to each other and to the whole of reality. Our being in the world is immersed in connections both seen and unseen. Authenticity requires that we choose the arduous path of understanding our complex cultural situation to find our moral compass and true identity. The alternative is to succumb to the inauthentic song of mass culture, allowing false and superficial appearance, opinion and emotion to form our views.

Christ faced an existential moment of authentic decision upon the Mount of Olives, to either choose the messianic call that would lead him through the gates of Jerusalem to the cross and resurrection, or to deny and ignore this deep sense of identity with the presence of God in our world. Christ chose courage over cowardice, sacrifice over selfishness, faith over failure, becoming our exemplary model of human perfection.

On the surface, the story of Holy Week is one of failure, ended by execution for sedition. But this appearance ignores the profound strategic victory of the resurrection, as Jesus proclaimed a spiritual transformation and liberation. His message was despised and rejected by the world, as Isaiah had predicted would happen to the suffering servant. The fickle crowd who welcomed him on Palm Sunday turned against him as the difficult implications of his message emerged. The confronting message appears immediately after his triumphal entry in Luke's account, as Jesus wept for Jerusalem as he prophesied the destruction of the temple, and then as he drove the moneychangers out of the temple and openly taught the wisdom of the Kingdom of God. Jesus justifies these actions by citing our text from Psalm 118 that the stone the builder refused will become the head of the corner.

These radical actions enabled his enemies to have him condemned to death on the cross, to show how the world emphatically rejects his spiritual vision of liberation. And yet the power and truth and vitality of his message of divine love lived on through the story of the resurrection, setting the path for the eventual coming victory of God in the world, a victory that remains the cornerstone of Christian hope. Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, God gave

Christ the tongue of a teacher and the ear of a listener. The result, after enduring insult and spitting, was vindication through the integrity of faith.

Without a keystone an arch cannot stand. To say the builders have rejected the cornerstone is a subversive teaching. It condemns the authorities and institutions of the world as blind and stupid, unable to see the essential nature of reality. The instinctive reaction of powerful people who are challenged in this way is to automatically reject such criticism. Emotions of pride and arrogance are central to worldly power, and simply cannot allow such direct challenge to their legitimacy and mandate.

And yet Paul teaches that it was precisely this type of teaching, the complete inversion of worldly values, that led God to exalt Christ. To call a slave a king, as Paul does in our text today, seems to insult the honour and prestige of real kings. To see the cross as the symbol of salvation pronounces a condemnation upon the political psychology that excludes and intimidates the voices of diversity and inclusion and justice.

Saint Luke tells us the celebrating crowd on Palm Sunday proclaimed Christ as Son of David bringing peace in heaven and glory in the highest. When the religious authorities sought to bully him into silence, Jesus responded by saying if these ones were silent the stones of the fields would cry out. The meaning is that the incarnation of Christ expressed a historical necessity, a world turning point. The worldly demand to silence the voice of Christ reflects an inability to see the need to reverse our collective cultural trajectory from decline and separation. Christ instead calls us to create a new vision of ascent toward unity in the spirit of love and faith. The paradigm shift brought by the new covenant of grace in Christ somehow speaks with the voice of the earth itself, calling us to integrate appearance and reality, working in a spirit of humble service toward the reconciliation of all things.

The triumphant vision of Palm Sunday challenges how our world of appearance ignores reality. The message of Christ confronted the political and religious leaders of his day with a call to honest dialogue. Their response of crucifixion symbolises how very far our fallen world is from the kingdom of God, while the resurrection symbolises the validity of faith in the victory of God. Paul reflects on the spiritual meaning of the confrontation between Christ and the world symbolised in the story of Holy Week when he tells us in 1 Corinthians 2 that among the mature, we speak a message of wisdom—but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of the mysterious and hidden wisdom of God, which He destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it. For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

May we pray today for new understanding of the mysterious and hidden wisdom of God.

Amen

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29

118:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

118:2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

118:19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

118:20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

118:21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

118:22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

118:23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

118:24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

118:25 Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

118:26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

118:27 The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

118:28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

118:29 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Luke 19:28-40

19:28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 19:29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 19:30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 19:31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" 19:32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 19:33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 19:34 They said, "The Lord needs it." 19:35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 19:36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 19:37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 19:38 saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 19:39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 19:40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Isaiah 50:4-9a

50:4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens-- awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 50:5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 50:6 I 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. 50:7 The 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; 50:8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 50:9a It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Philippians 2:5-11

2:5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 2:6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 2:7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 2:8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. 2:9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 2:11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.