

Karen Hollis | March 28, 2021

Mark 15:1-5, 16-20

Palm Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

As we read through Mark's gospel, we can see the tensions building as Jesus travels around Galilee, teaching the masses and healing the sick. The Pharisees and Sadducees observe and question Jesus, coming to quick conclusions that this man cannot be corrected by pointing out his obvious transgressions or argued into seeing the truth. The only way to overpower him is brute force. As long as he keeps traveling and steers clear of Jerusalem, Jesus can continue on with his ministry . . . but when the time comes, he faces his fate head on. The tension builds and builds throughout his week in Jerusalem. He preaches publicly at the Temple and bests the Temple leaders at their own theological games; the infuriated leaders listen carefully to Jesus' words, working together to build a case against him. It all escalates to this moment where Jesus is brought before Pilate. The emotions are out of control with the Temple leaders on one side, incensed that just hours before, Jesus had the audacity to claim that he is the Messiah. On the other side there are crowds of people who earlier in the week were waving their palms and crying Hosanna . . . it's easy to forget that Hosanna isn't a call of celebration, but a call of desperation . . . Jesus save us, save us now! They greeted Jesus with all their hopes and expectations, but in this moment the crowds see him bound and passive. Their fear and disappointment are unimaginable . . . he was our hope . . . now look at him . . . now what? Jesus, how dare you let us put our hope in you.

I heard a preacher say recently that a lot of Christians today focus so intently on Jesus' second coming because they are so disappointed with the first one. Enough with this meek king business. Disappointed Christians proclaim that when Jesus comes again, he will bring all the force, all the ammunition, and destroy evil for good.

But you can't beat evil with force, because evil likes it. Evil likes the fight. It likes to harm; likes to hurt. Evil uses brokenness to get its hooks into people and offers an easy expression of pain through violence. It works . . . violence begets violence . . . until now. Jesus does something different. He stands in the midst of

them all: the crowds crying out, the Temple leaders fuming, the soldiers anxiously waiting their turn to mock and humiliate him. Jesus stands there, absorbing all of the feelings and intentions . . . he doesn't speak up, he doesn't explain, he doesn't defend himself . . . he has already said everything he came here to say, already explained it all, already told people about what was going to happen . . . he stands there, absorbing it all, illustrating for everyone another way. Pilate stands in the middle with Jesus, astonished at what he is seeing. Who is this man who doesn't follow the norms of this world?

Who is this man who offers another way? What does he know? What is the truth that grounds him in the midst of the chaos of this world? Jesus calls it the kingdom of God . . . and he invites everyone into this deeper and truer reality where strength is known in weakness and where life is found in death. He invites all of us into a realm of paradox where the power exerted is forgiveness and the law of the land is love. Jesus spends his ministry showing by example how this kingdom is opened when we pour ourselves out for others even in small ways.¹ And now Jesus stands before the people, prepared to offer himself again in one extraordinary outpouring of love, that all may know the love and mercy of God's kingdom. Amen.

¹ Raschko 148.