

**The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber**  
**Palm Sunday - 3.29.26**

Judas and Peter betray him. The others abandon him. The priests and leaders throw him under the bus to save themselves. Pilate confuses and gaslights the crowd into turning on themselves and condemning him. The soldiers and crowds mock him. The Romans crucify him.

There is so much cruelty, fear, and betrayal in today's story. But I am drawn to something else on this day. I want to notice Jesus, what he does and what he says.

Jesus rides into town on a donkey covered with cloaks. People wave and throw branches at him, hailing him as a king. Imagine. Imagine this instead as a procession from Philadelphia City Hall to the Art Museum. Jesus is riding a child's scooter and wearing a Superman cape. People lining the streets are holding signs and chanting.

This is no serious royal procession. Jesus is mocking the idea of royalty, mocking the emperor whose city he is entering. This Palm Sunday parade was a No Kings protest march.

Jesus comes into Jerusalem in protest. And he keeps going. Inside the Temple, priests are making daily sacrifices for the health and wellbeing of the emperor. Jesus gums up the works of that system by turning over the tables. Roman sentries are on constant watch from a tower beside the Temple grounds. Jesus' act is the ancient times equivalent of parking a car in front of the ICE offices on 8th street, early in the morning, so that the officers can't get their cars out.

Does Jesus go into hiding after this? No, he does not. He publicly continues teaching and preaching and prophesying, attracting large groups everywhere.

Then Jesus eats dinner with his closest friends. He tells them, one of you will betray me. He tells them, I will die. He tells them, you will probably run away.

Jesus knows what is coming. You or I might have a good idea of the likely outcome too. It is well known what Romans do to insurrectionists, to protestors, to anyone disturbing the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. Jesus knows, and he is deeply grieved as the text says, or as we would say, he is terrified out of his mind.

In his state of extreme fear and agitation, Jesus prays.

He prays, Father, can we please not do this. Then prays, Not what I want but what you want. Jesus surrenders, he puts his fate, his fears, into God's hands.

After praying, Jesus goes to meet his fate, to face his betrayer and the full power of the empire.

And what does Jesus do now? Does he have some final defiant acts? Does he call down heavenly armies? Does he have his friends take out as many soldiers as possible? Does he try to run?

No. Jesus tells his followers to put the swords away. He is silent in response to accusations and taunts. He does not struggle or try to run.

Jesus surrenders. He makes one last prayer, one last plea to God as he suffers on the cross, God, where are you? Why have you abandoned me?

Jesus breathes his last. He passes from death to resurrection. The temple curtain is torn, heaven and earth are joined.

Jesus comes into Jerusalem. He protests. He resists. He pushes back. He challenges the system. He prays. In his final act of defiance, his final act of power, he stops resisting.

He does not meet state violence with violence. Jesus allows himself to be completely vulnerable. In his total act of letting go, of surrender, Jesus shows what true power is. Jesus reveals that the forces of power for power's sake, the forces of violence and cruelty and death, never never have the last word. Jesus walks straight through the horror of the cross to defy these powers, straight through death into new life.

This is not a magic trick by a superhero Jesus. This is the power of God, the divine presence Jesus is so deeply and fully in touch with in his core being. Jesus is able to tap into this power through his prayer, through his intimate connection with God. This is the salvation Jesus shows us in his act of surrender and sacrifice. It is the same divine spark we all have inside each of us as God's beloved children.

Many of us here today are carrying crosses. We are grieving. We are coping with serious health challenges, we are caring for a loved one with a terrible illness.

All of us are collectively carrying the crosses of our current world. War. Financial burden. Travel mayhem. Traumatizing revelations, from Epstein associates to Cesar Chavez. Terror in our own streets, by our own government.

We are suffering. We are heartbroken. We are exhausted and overwhelmed. We feel powerless. We are powerless.

We are powerless. And this is our power, too.

Jesus has shown us the way of protest, of prayer, of walking to and through the cross. Jesus has shown us that while power seekers will destroy true power over and over and over, they will not win. Jesus has shown us that love is stronger than death.

Jesus has walked this way. This Holy Week we again walk with him. To remember. To practice the power of our own surrender. To live into the Gospel Story, which is our story too. To see the way to our own Resurrection. So let us begin. Amen.