From Wilderness to Resurrection Hope

Palm Sunday: A Servant's Heart

Readings: Isaiah 50. 4-9a, Philippians 2. 5-11, Matthew 2. 1-11

I'm standing here on the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley toward the Old City. From this hillside, Jesus approached Jerusalem in the days leading to his passion. The palms, the cloaks on the road, the crowds shouting "Hosanna!" all of it began right here. The Mount of Olives has witnessed the unfolding of extraordinary events throughout history, but on this day, it saw something utterly different: the procession of a servant-king. Today's readings invite us to see the world from this vantage point, the vantage point of Jesus' humility and self-giving love. And they offer an invitation to us too. An invitation to cultivate a servant's heart.



Here on this hillside, you can picture Jesus preparing to embody these words. He chooses a donkey, not a warhorse. He chooses vulnerability, not spectacle. He chooses humility, not force. This is what it means to "empty himself". To let go of entitlement, to relinquish power as the world understands it, and to walk the path of peace, even when that path is costly.

Isaiah offers us a portrait of God's servant who leads not through domination, but through attentive listening, "Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen." The Servant, given the tongue of a teacher, listens before speaking, acting, or assuming he knows what is needed. This kind of listening is not passive. It's an active choice to be open to God and open to others.

The gospels tell us that Jesus spent a lot of time here on the Mount of Olives. He teaches his disciples here. He stays here during Holy Week and comes to the garden at the base of the hill to spend that agonising evening before his arrest, listening for the voice of the Father and embodying God's servant described by Isaiah.

So from Isaiah's listening servant, Paul leads us in his letter to the Philippians into the heart of Christ's humility: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." This not only takes us to the heart of Christ; it also takes us to the heart of the Father. In the Greek, the word used for 'who' can also, in context, be translated as 'because'. In other words because Christ was God, he emptied himself and took the form of a servant.

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continued

From Wilderness to Resurrection Hope

Palm Sunday: A Servant's Heart (continued)

In a world where strength is measured by military might, strong words and acts of aggression, Christ's servant heart is profoundly counter cultural. Indeed it is revolutionary because it refuses cynicism. It refuses fear. It refuses the seductive pull of power for its own sake. Instead the servant heart asks. who needs me to listen today? Where must I let go of my own thirst for recognition and power. How can I walk gently into spaces of tension and pain?

Our reading from Matthew now places Jesus on this hillside as begins what has often been called the triumphal entry. But its true heartbeat is servanthood. Jesus instructs his disciples to fetch a donkey, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy: "Your king comes to you… humble and riding on a donkey." This is what the kingdom of God looks like arriving in vulnerability, peace, and humility, echoing the birth of Jesus in a humble cattle stall in Bethlehem.

From this mountain, with Jerusalem stretched out before us, the call is clear to listen deeply, like the Servant of Isaiah. Let go bravely, like Christ in Philippians. And enter the world in peace, like Jesus in Matthew.

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Standing here, in the land where Jesus lived out this servant-hearted love, I am once again filled with love and admiration for the extraordinary ministry of Embrace the Middle East's Christian partners. They listen morning by morning to the needs of their communities. They let go of comfort to stand alongside the vulnerable. They enter broken places with peace, healing, and hope. They embody a servant's heart, quietly, persistently restoring dignity where it has been diminished, and life where it has been threatened. Their work is a living echo of Christ's compassion on this very hillside.

This Lent, Embrace is inviting each of us to join in Acts of Hope, small, deliberate, servant-hearted choices that help bring light into shadowed places.

Acts of Hope might mean listening more deeply to voices from the Middle East that we have not heard before. Letting go of assumptions, judgements, or fears that keep us from empathy. Listening to the cries of those who suffer under the weight of injustice and then choosing to amplify their voices. Praying for peace with honesty and courage and sacrificially giving in ways that restore dignity and possibility. Each act, small though it may seem, is a seed of resurrection hope

So as we enter Holy Week let's pray that God may awaken our ears to listen, open our hearts to serve, and strengthen our steps to walk Christ's path of peace. And as we join in Acts of Hope, may we discover for ourselves that servanthood is the path to resurrection.