

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 23:1-49

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

April 10, 2022

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

---

Take my life and let it be. Maybe you know this hymn.

This morning, I want us to imagine Jesus singing these words as he entered Jerusalem. As the crowds surrounded him, as branches were laid on the ground to welcome him, as he heard the sounds of the Roman army in the distance, the growing clamor of Passover, the streets filling with travelers.

Take my life and let it be, God.

These are the words of one of my favorite hymns. It's been sung and adapted over the years more times than I can count...you can find endless versions online. (We played three of the versions a couple of weeks ago in our Lenten Lunch gathering.) And, this morning I want to read some of the words of this beautiful hymn to you. And as I read, I want you to imagine Jesus singing these words as he enters Jerusalem. To help set the stage remember that we just prayed this prayer in our liturgy...

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified. He first suffered pain and was crucified. This is what Jesus is facing as he enters the city gates.

And, now imagine these words on his heart as the palms are laid at his feet...

Take my life, and let it be  
 Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
 Take my moments and my days,  
 Let them flow in ceaseless praise

(Another palm is laid down)

Take my feet and let them be  
 Swift and beautiful for Thee.

(Jesus travels down a few more stone pathways)

Take my voice, and let me sing  
 Always, only, for my King;  
 Take my lips, and let them be  
 Filled with messages from Thee,

(More palms are laid down)

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

(The noise grows as Jesus looks ahead)

Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Jesus enters Jerusalem giving everything over to God. His whole life. And in doing so, Jesus will be betrayed, denied, mocked, beaten, insulted and eventually killed and yet he still sings...take myself and I will be ever only all for thee. And he walks into the crowd.

There are a couple of important lessons in this hymn that will help us understand Jesus' journey to the cross during Holy Week, how he looked ahead with faithfulness and courage. Lessons that will help us journey to the cross in our own lives so that we, too, can sing "Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

The first lesson from our hymn, is that Jesus traveled into the city committed to trusting in God's love. The second lesson is that Jesus committed to using his life as a testament to this love. Trust and Commitment.

Let's start with trust. Jesus comes into Jerusalem and trusts that his life is in God's hands. Not the hands of the world, but the hands of God. He knows that he will suffer. I would even go so far as to say that he was probably scared at times at what he would face inside those city walls but fear and confusion was never more powerful than his ability to follow God's will for him. Take my life and let it be. Take my moments and my days and let them flow in ceaseless praise.

And, then Jesus committed to giving his actions all over to God so that his life shone forth the transformational nature of God's love fully present within humanity. He committed his actions toward love even though he knew he would face unbearable pain, cruel humans, hurtful words, and mental anguish. Yet, he still able to say, take my feet, my voice, my hands, my heart. Let them be filled with messages of you, God, no matter what I may have to go through. Keep me focused. Let me be forgiving and kind. Let me show love and care. Let my heart be your heart.

When Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he encourages his readers to let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus. Paul says to empty yourself just as Jesus did. Humble yourself and become obedient. Trust in God and commit your life to God.

Paul asks us...Do you remember how Jesus was able to trust God as he entered Jerusalem, well now I want you to give that same kind of trust to God. Remember how Jesus worked to embody

God's love even in the midst of incredible pain? Well, I want you to also embody God's love in your life. With those you hate, with those who have hurt you, in those moments you are tempted to lie or cheat or steal. I want you to remember your promises to God. Be of the same mind as Christ because it matters in the depths of your soul and it matters to the wellbeing of this world.

I find Paul's letter to be a powerful reading for Palm Sunday because it reminds us that Jesus' journey is also our journey. We have to make the same decision to put our lives in God's hands when we carry our own crosses. And not only that, we also are called to commit to God as Jesus did...to reflect the love of God in all that we do, in all that we say, in all that we are...even when faced with adversity, even in those dark corners where we prefer not to go.

It's that self-giving, abundant love that is at the heart of this hymn. And that kind of love is far stronger than any obstacle we may face on our journey. It's the kind of love that is worth trusting. It's the kind of love worth committing ourselves to.

Let me share this story with you...Have you ever heard of 5B? It's a hospital ward at San Francisco Memorial that was created in 1983 in response to the early days of the AIDS crisis. At this time, no one knew what was causing the disease. Many of you will remember what that time was like. But 5B became something hopeful.

When 5B was created to treat AIDS patients, there was no cure for the disease. In fact, no one knew how it was spread. Patients at other hospitals went without care, often not even able to get their basic human needs met. Nurses and doctors were afraid to touch them. Helpless, these children of God were left to suffer alone.

That's when 5B was created. The hospital put out a call for volunteers and was eventually staffed with caregivers who knew nothing about the risk they were taking but did it anyway. They were told to first talk to their loved ones at home and let them know they could catch the disease. They could die. In the unknown years of AIDS, this was a risk no one could quantify.

But these nurses and doctors went to work anyway. Putting aside protocols, they held patients' hands, without gloves and without protective measures. They held them and stayed by their bedside. These self-less workers knew they couldn't cure their patients but they could love them. And that's what they did. For them, what was once a state of confusion and fear became the well of kindness and love and compassion that arises when we say to God, take my life and let it be.

We may not be able to be like those caregivers in 5B; at least not right away. It may take time and prayer to figure out how to trust and commit our lives to people and places that challenge us. But we will surely have opportunities to try. We will have moments to trust in God and commit to using our lives as vehicles for his hands and feet and heart out in the world.

Go back for a moment to the prayer we said earlier in the service... Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified. The prayer goes on to say: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Give us mercy to walk the way of the cross and help us to find life and peace on the way trusting and committing ourselves to you, God.

Now, I want you to listen to the words of our hymn one more time. This time, imagine that you are saying these words right when you are in the midst of your own cross. At that moment allow yourself to trust God's love for you and with the deepest sense of peace in your heart commit to these words...

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee,

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Amen.