



Broken Reflections: Broken Voices

Mark 11:1-11, 14:53-65, 15:6-15

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As the season of lent draws to a close this week, as we anticipate the recollection of the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry, we focus once more on the *Broken Reflections* of our world. Each of the past six weeks, we have come in to this space, seen our shattered reflection in these mirrors, and been reminded that it is because of these damaged places that God sent Christ to offer reconciliation amidst wrecked relationships, healing into the brokenness of our personal lives, and salvation for the sin of humanity. Today, as we hear the story read of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus' trial and his sentencing, we consider our broken voices.

The story tell us that Jesus is making his way over the Mount of Olives, coming from the town of Bethany, which lies just a few miles opposite of Jerusalem. He tells the disciples to go ahead of him to find a colt – a young, unridden donkey – tied up at the edge of town. If someone asks what they are doing, Jesus gives them instructions to respond, saying, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here."

It's not quite clear if this story is displaying the omnipotence of the divine, or if Jesus has carefully constructed the events that will take place in the coming day. Was Jesus just so aware of all things, as one accredits him as God, incarnate, that he knew of the donkey's location and how the bystanders would respond? Or had Jesus done some careful arranging, having sent ahead and told the village's people to prepare a colt and how to respond? Had Jesus orchestrated the upcoming parade as nothing more than well-designed 'street theater'?ⁱ Every good king knows the people can't refuse a good parade of pomp and circumstance.

This kind of coincidence doesn't have the same kind of appeal as Jesus' other miracles – where people known to be blind from birth were able to see, or where people known to be lepers were healed of their spots, or where people known to be unable to walk were seen walking after an encounter with Jesus. Rev. Scott Hoezee ponders if this story is more of a parlor trick than a grand miracle.ⁱⁱ However it came to be, it was just as Jesus said. The disciples found the colt, responded to the bystanders as instructed, and brought the colt to Jesus as his chariot.

I imagine the disciples are a bit anxious about the events that are going to follow. Jesus has been travelling throughout the region, teaching and healing, preparing the disciples for a time to come when he might step into his full reign. Mark's gospel has for the most part masked Jesus' identity, but in the presence of the disciples, Jesus has been identified as the Son of God. For Jesus – the Son of God – to have come to the precipice of entering into the Holy City, it feels as if Jesus is about to throw down. You know what I mean? Stuff's about to *get real*. Who wouldn't be nervous about this coming moment?

No doubt, the disciples had great faith in Jesus. I mean, they did the whole “go get the donkey” thing without stopping to consider the punishment if they got caught stealing someone’s livestock. But you can’t convince me they aren’t at least a little bit unsure of what the day’s events will entail.

I’ve always a bit anxious about big events. The anxiety has manifested itself in different throughout my life. Sometimes it’s just a nervous tick, other times it’s like a swarm of bees in my stomach – butterflies just aren’t that powerful. In my 20s, I started having tremendous muscle pain in my shoulders and back before any big events. Once I even had to see a chiropractor to work out the muscle cramps, it was so bad. I can’t explain why I have such physical reactions to pending celebrations, but such anxiety is not uncommon. Sometimes even the most celebratory of occasions brings about great tension.

I wonder if this tension wasn’t present in the life of the disciples. We often read the story of Palm Sunday as if it were a day of relief in the tension of Lent. We read the story as if the disciples entered Jerusalem alongside Jesus with a strong confident sense of what was to come. We try to picture them escorting Jesus with confidence and walking with swagger. But such a reading goes against the reality of the situation. These are not wealthy men following Jesus. These are outcasts; they are fisherman and Galileans; they are susceptible to the wrath of the temple leaders and the Roman overlords.

Entering with Jesus, a man who was proclaimed by the masses to be the king of the Jews, as he rode on a steed, with people draping their cloaks and greenery before his path was a slap in the face of the Roman government and the Jewish leaders. There is nothing safe about this processional down the Mount of Olives and into the Old City. Yet, the concern is not just that he proceeded with such a celebratory ride, it’s that Jesus’ processional makes a mockery of the political leaders of the time. He rides in not on a royal horse, but on a young colt. He is jeering the Roman leadership of the day, as his ride redefines political power – demonstrating humility instead of supremacy, proclaiming justice instead of authority, offering healing instead of threatening destruction.

And yet, as he rides, even in the anxious fear of what is to come, the people lift their voices and shout, “Hosanna!”

Hosanna.

Ho-sanna – a word that means *save us*. I wonder if they’re inviting Jesus to offer the saving, or perhaps “save us” is their beckoning cry to God given that the man proclaimed to be king is making his triumphant entrance riding a donkey. Is their cry more of exasperation to God than to praise Jesus? Yet the proclaim, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Save us (Hosanna)!”

Hear the shout of beckoning voices who cry out for the saving power of God as Jesus is celebrated on the jubilant Palm Sunday ride. People in need are quick to raise their voice in praise of any who claim to offer a new life – who promise they come in the name of the Lord – who declare they are the way to salvation.

But just as soon as their voices cry out, the story shifts. Mark's gospel offers that Jesus goes to the temple to have a look around. Once he had seen everything he left; he went back to Bethany with the 12. The grand processional ends in a mere inspection and a quiet return across the mountain. The glorious entrance ends in a quiet departure. Is it here the people begin to lose hope? Is it here, in the anticlimactic ride of Jesus that ends with a simple once-over of the temple, where the people begin to lose faith?

The shouts of Hosanna stand in stark contrast to the eerie absence of support for Jesus at the midnight rendezvous, taking place at the home of the high priest. Here, not only are there no shouts of Hosanna, waving palms, or ceremonial donkeys, but the disciples themselves, Jesus' most ardent supports, are absent. The only glimpse of support comes in the lingering figure of Peter, who keeps his distance from the mock trial taking place.

Jesus has been arrested, and the only voices that speak act as many in power still do, bending the truth to further their cause, believing their cause to be good and right for the community writ large. But as in any such case, false testimonies don't hold up, and their accusations against Jesus are almost dismissed. Yet, the only one who could offer true condemnation against him speaks. That is, Jesus himself speaks. Jesus condemns himself in the eyes of the temple leaders, proclaiming his identity as the messiah, the Son of Man, the one who is the *I am*.

And yet, the voices of those who just days before shouted 'Hosanna' remain silent. How can this man save us? Jesus is in handcuffs, prepared to stand trial, and is not showing any signs of being the king they thought him to be. How quickly we lose our voices when our visions for glory are shattered.

Following his condemnation in the house of the high priest, Jesus is taken to the Roman Governor, who has the authority to condemn and sentence Jesus. Pontius Pilate had no reason to condemn Jesus. This man had been deserted by his followers and had been arrested by a Jewish mob – he's clearly not a threat to the Roman rule, which boasts great power and might. But Pilate has his motives. He's "a career politician doing what imperial powers thinks he needs to do to keep order."ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus' presence and teaching, and now his arrest, had caused quite a stir in the region. Pilate no doubt thought that the best way to 'keep the peace' was to give in to Jewish leaders. Historically speaking, this was not an abnormal practice for Pilate, who is believed to have acquiesced to the demands of the Jewish leaders multiple times to maintain control.

As he seeks for a way to calm the crowds, Pilate asks, 'What do you wish for me to do with this man you call the king of the Jews?'

From shouts of Hosanna, to fearful silence, the crowds have again found their voices. “Crucify him!”

Pilate seems shocked as he responds, “Wait, what? Why, what evil has this man done?”

All the louder, they shouted again, “Crucify him!”

When our leaders show promise and offer hope, we stand behind them and offer shouts of praise upon them. When they fail to live up to those promises, we disappear in silence. When their downfall is guaranteed, we join the chorus of those who cry for their literal or metaphorical crucifixion. In our brokenness and searching for hope and new life, in our desire for healing and renewed power, in our fractured lives, *even our voices* are broken.

On Palm Sunday, the shouts of Hosanna, the yearning for God to follow through on his promise for newfound glory, they do not provide for us a temporary pause of celebration. Though we may wave our palms and sing with gusto the Hosannas, Palm Sunday does not offer us a moment of reprieve in a season of repentance. No, today offers us a chance to question our own participation in the story.

Though we cry Hosanna as we process, do we silence ourselves as we depart? Do we cry out for Christ to save us, only to abandon the hope of salvation when such saving acts do not follow the standard model of kingly power? Do we follow his teachings, praise Him for miracles, yet join the chorus for his death when we find him absent, silenced, or condemned?

If the events of this weekend have taught me anything, if the presence of our youth around the globe has made anything clear, it’s that we have a voice, and we’ve been taught how to use it. Will we use it to join in the work of Christ? Or in fear for our own safety, will we join the chorus, which seeks to crucify the one who taught love, who made manifest peace, who dined with the poor and outcast, who demanded justice, who fulfilled the law, who broke through racial barriers, who called for faithful followers to live as he lived, to love as he loved, and to teach as he taught?

Holy Week, begun in the tension of the descent down the Mount of Olives with the cries of Hosanna, is not a time to celebrate that we are but one week from Easter, but is a time to wonder, where is our voice heard in the story? By the grace of God, may we remember this week, that our Lord gave himself to death, to the cross, that our voices may be healed, that we may use our voices to praise his name, that all may know the great love of the Savior. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Charles L. Campbell. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Year B, Volume 2*. Eds. Barbara Brown Taylor & David L. Bartlett. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008.

ⁱⁱ Scott Hoezee. cep.calvinseminary.edu. Retrieved March 19, 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ William C. Placher. *Mark: Belief, a Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011.