

PALM SUNDAY C

Luke 22:14 - 23:56

### **Faces in the Crowd**

Two types of people were touched by the cross:

those touched by choice and those touched by chance.

Among the latter, some intriguing tales are still told.

Take Malchus, for example.

As a servant of the high-priest, he was doing his job at the Garden.

Yet, this routine raid would have been his last

if he had not been quick to duck.

The torches gave just enough light for him to see the flash of the sword

and “**swoosh!**” Malchus leans back enough to save his neck

but not his ear.

Peter gets a rebuke and Malchus gets a healing touch,

and the event is history.

History, that is, to everyone but Malchus.

Had it not been for the telltale bloodstain on his cloak,

he might have awakened the next morning

talking about a crazy dream he'd had.

Some believe that Malchus was later numbered

among the believers at Jerusalem. We don't know for sure.

But we can be sure of one thing: from that night on,

whenever Malchus would hear people talk

about the carpenter who rose from the dead, he wouldn't scoff.

No, he'd tug at his earlobe and know that it was possible.

It happened too fast.

One minute, Barabbas was in his cell on death row playing the tic-tac-toe

on the dirt walls, and the next he was outside squinting his eyes

at the bright sun.

***"You're free to go."*** Barabbas scratched his beard. ***"What?"***

***“You’re free. They took the Nazarene instead of you.”***

Barabbas has often been compared to humanity, and rightly so.

In many ways he stands for us: a prisoner who was freed

because someone he had never seen took his place.

But I think Barabbas was probably smarter than we are in one respect.

As far as we know, he took his sudden freedom for what it was,

an undeserved gift.

Someone tossed him a life preserver and he grabbed it,

no questions asked. You couldn’t imagine him pulling some of our stunts.

We take our free gift and try to earn it or diagnose it or pay for it,

instead of simply saying, ***“thank you”*** and accepting it.

Ironic as it may appear, one of the hardest things to do

is to be saved by grace.

There’s something in us that reacts to God’s free gift.

We have some weird compulsion to create laws,  
systems, and regulations that will make us **“worthy”** of our gift.

Why do we do that? The only reason I can figure is pride.

To accept grace means to accept its necessity,  
and most people don't like to do that.

To accept grace also means that one realizes his or her despair,  
and most people aren't too keen on doing that either.

Barabbas, though, knew better.

Hopelessly stranded on death row,  
he wasn't about to balk at a granted stay of execution.

Maybe he didn't understand mercy and surely,  
he didn't deserve it, but he wasn't about to refuse it.

We might do well to realize that our plight  
isn't too different than that of Barabbas's.

We, too, are prisoners with no chance for appeal.

But, why some prefer to stay in prison when the cell door  
has been unlocked is a mystery worth pondering.

If it is true that a picture paints a thousand words,

then, there was a **Roman** who got a dictionary full.

All he did was see Jesus suffer.

He never heard him preach or saw him heal

or follow him through the crowds.

He never witnessed him still the wind: he only witnessed the way he died.

But that was all it took to cause this weather-worn soldier

to take a giant step in faith. He said:

***“Certainly, this was a righteous and innocent man.”<sup>1</sup>***

That says a lot, doesn't it? It says the rubber of faith

meets the road of reality under hardship.

It says the trueness of one's belief is revealed in pain.

Genuineness and character are unveiled in misfortune.

Faith is at its best, not in three-piece suits on Sunday mornings

or at V.B.S. at camp on summer days,

but at hospital bedsides, cancer wards, and cemeteries.

Maybe that's what moved this old, crusty soldier.

Serenity in suffering is a stirring testimony.

Anybody can preach a sermon on a mount surrounded by daisies.

But only one with a gut full of faith can **live** a sermon

on a mountain of pain.

For us there is no greater story in the history of humanity

than that of Holy Week. The drama that unfolded over those eight days

changed everything instantly and forever.

Whether you are a believer in Jesus Christ

or someone who discovered this church by chance,

the journey you are about to embark upon has no rival.

The events of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter,  
and all the days in between, are at least foundational  
for understanding the world you exist in now, and,  
at their most significant, pillars upon which the entirety of eternity exists.

Perhaps it is fitting then, that as we close our time together today  
on this Palm Sunday, we end with a scene of triumph.

Let the words of scripture wash over you like any propelling text.

Can you smell the dust, feel the heat of the sun,  
hear the shouts of the crowd?

Watch as Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey  
(fulfilling the prophecies recorded in Zachariah.)

Listen as men and women hailed him with cries of ***“Hosanna!”***

which means “**save!**” and choruses of what was written in **Psalm 118**,

***“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”***

Take it all in,

the thought line of scripture playing out before you in your eyes.

Don't fret if you didn't see the connections at first,

neither did Jesus's closest followers,

although they would come to in time.

Today is the day for celebration.

The king has arrived.

It wasn't what the Jews had in mind

a warrior, come to destroy their enemies in conquest.

But he was what all of humanity needed and still needs,

the one with authority to crush the true enemy under his heel

and to bring peace between heaven and mankind.



To the believing, join the chorus of the crowd today.

Sing praise for the King has come here.

To the wandering find your place in the crowd and follow along.

Perhaps you will find what you've been looking for.

One thing is certain, none of us will ever be the same. Amen

**Note:**

**1. Luke 23:47**