

Sermon, Palm and Passion Sunday 2022, (Luke 22:14-23:56) St. David's Episcopal Church  
(Elizabeth Felicetti)

Good morning. Holy Week starts this morning with Palm Sunday, except it's not Palm Sunday in the Gospel of Luke. Did you notice that? They don't set palms or leafy branches before Jesus, but rather their cloaks. Does this matter? I personally am not troubled by differences between the various gospels. I accept them all as true and enjoy ruminating on the variations among them. I'm fascinated by the idea of spreading cloaks instead of palm branches because it seems so much more personal.

People wear cloaks, so presumably after the colt walked over them, they picked the cloaks back up. Maybe they shook them out to get out the dust or maybe the cloaks had to be washed and mended. Maybe the cloaks weren't wearable again. But this action of setting down cloaks feels more personal to me than palms. Putting down one's own clothes costs more than putting down branches from a tree.

In Bible study last Wednesday we had a discussion that many of you will find familiar: that is, which person of the Trinity, Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, do you relate to the most? For many of us who had talked about this before, our answer had changed after the pandemic. One of those people was Hector, who said that since the pandemic he relates to Jesus the most, because Jesus was human and did stuff. During the pandemic, there was so much we couldn't do, and Hector wanted to focus on what we *could* do.

Ginny Butler, our current buildings and grounds vestry chair, also related to Jesus the most because Jesus was human like us and didn't just preach but also got his hands dirty and got stuff done. While I was writing this sermon, Ginny was leading four other women in working on the Celtic knot floor that we all walk over every Sunday as we enter through the glass doors.

Ginny also worked on our children's garden that I hope you saw as you came in: if you didn't, check it out on your way out, with its hill with three crosses and an empty tomb. Ginny and Hector, in addition to their many gifts, work with their hands, relating to us in Bible study that they resonate with Jesus the most in the persons of the Trinity, while acknowledging that the Trinity is three persons who all work together, giving us our best, imperfect image of the divine.

Cloaks instead of palm branches seem to me to be an effective way to follow Jesus, because it's more personal, more costly. Of course, some of the same people who set out their cloaks on Sunday were also in the crowd shouting "Crucify him! Crucify him!" just days later.

There are a couple of other differences in Luke's version of this story that could be fruitful for reflection. In the garden, Luke and Matthew and Mark show the disciples sleeping while Jesus prays, but Luke doesn't rub it in the way Matthew and Mark do. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus

wakes the disciples up three times after they have fallen asleep. This isn't what Luke chooses to emphasize. Luke gives us more detail about other aspects of that night.

For example, while the other two gospels just say that he prayed a short distance away from the disciples, Luke tells us that it was a stone's throw. I'm sure Jesus could throw a stone a lot further than I can, but that detail shows me that he could still see them. He wanted to pray alone but in sight of these friends he so loved, and with whom he had just shared a meal. Everything was about to change for him. He knew that he would rise again and change the world, but this life that he had loved was about to change, and he would undergo a horrific ordeal. I appreciate the comforting image of being able to see his friends while he prayed.

While Jesus' prayer is essentially the same here as in the parallel Gospel accounts, praying that this cup be removed if it was God's will, Luke also adds an angel who appeared and gave Jesus strength, another comforting image. And despite being able to see his friends and having an angel appear, Jesus still suffered while praying. Luke writes that in Jesus' anguish, his sweat became like great drops of blood on the ground. What a powerful metaphor. I appreciate Luke's focus on Jesus' own anguish instead of so much about the disciples. We still see that they were unable to support him in the way he wanted, but the focus is on Jesus' great sadness.

A third difference is that while all four gospels include the detail during the arrest that someone cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant, but only Luke shows Jesus touching the man's ear and healing him. I'm grateful for this vision of Jesus caring for this servant of his enemies in the midst of his own arrest.

On Palm and Passion Sunday so much is going on in our liturgy. I hope that looking at these three differences—cloaks instead of palms, focus on prayer instead of sleeping disciples in the garden, and Jesus healing the servant's ear in the garden in the midst of his arrest—I hope that reflecting on these three things unique to Luke might help you as we begin Holy Week: the last supper, the cross, the grave, and the resurrection. This will be a busy week at church, with many opportunities for you to worship before we celebrate the resurrection. Please, please come to as many of them as you can.