



Our Vulnerable Courageous God
Palm Sunday April 6, 2020
The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Church, Needham, MA

I have just a short reflection this morning.

With Palm Sunday, we stand at the portal of Holy Week. The Rituals of Holy week constitute an ancient practice that walks us liturgically and symbolically through the last week of Jesus' life. With ancient prayers, gestures, and hymns, we remember his last days, his death and resurrection. For centuries, countless believers have been strengthened and encouraged by this way of remembering the mighty acts of God that have accomplished our salvation and lead us to hope.

But each time we return to this ancient practice—and some among us have participated in scores of Holy Weeks—we occupy a different space. That has never been more true than today. The fact that we are gazing upon screens—rather than processing out the Parish Hall door, making a right down Rosemary Street, then a right onto Highland Avenue, the up the front steps of the Church, trying to wave palms, sing, and walk all at the same time, singing off-kilter—says it all.

We approach the cross and empty tomb in a completely different way this year. We gather virtually in the face of a stealthy virus that upends our lives and our supposed certainties and brings suffering and death to more and more.

We bring all that we are—our wounds and joys, our hopes and fears, our wisdom and vulnerabilities; and especially our yearning to be together, at a time when love for the vulnerable among us prevents us from doing so—we bring all that to re-member the Body of Christ through the power of sight and sound and Spirit.

We approach the Lord with a deep need for reassurance that we are not alone and that it will all be OK, for a deep yearning for some certainty in a future over which we have no control, for protection for our loved ones, for endurance and patience. We approach the Lord with deep gratitude for those who serve at great risk.

The reading from Isaiah this morning takes us, I believe, deep into the mind of Jesus as we begin this walk in this Holy Week.

The Book of Isaiah has its own integrity as a book of Hebrew Scripture. Yet it has also been common for Christians throughout the centuries to see portions of Isaiah as describing the promised Messiah, who Christians claim as Jesus, the Christ.

We are living in a time when we are reminded that vulnerability and strength are bound so tightly together that we cannot separate them.



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This morning, Isaiah speaks in the first person of his gifts as a teacher. He speaks of his vulnerability—his back beaten; his cheeks plucked. Yet because of his utter dependence on God, he can also speak of setting his face like flint against his adversaries, a most profound kind of courage.

And that is the Jesus will see in a moment, when we hear the passion narrative. He refuses to use words to defend himself. He has committed himself to living his life in such a vulnerable way—teaching and preaching and living God’s healing love for all, especially for those who are the weakest — that he was bound to die at the hands of those who were threatened by this subversive way of being. In his vulnerability, he is so sustained by the love and justice of God that there is simply no other way that he can live.

The researcher Brené Brown writes about courage. She has consulted with CEOs, special forces troops, even the NFL. And she always asks the same question: “ ‘Give me an example of courage that you’ve seen in your life or that you, yourself, have engaged in, any act of bravery, that was not completely defined by vulnerability.’ No one has, to this day — even special forces; when Navy Seals can’t tell you, then no one can tell you — because the problem is, there is no courage without vulnerability. But we’re all taught to be brave, and then we’re all warned, growing up, to not be vulnerable. And so that’s the rub. And so, when you have bravery without vulnerability, that’s when you get what we’re looking at today: all bluster, all posturing, no real courage.” <https://onbeing.org/programs/brene-brown-strong-back-soft-front-wild-heart/>

Holy courage. That’s what Jesus shows us. As the Living Word, he sustains us with courage. We see reflections of that courage in the service of those who toil in peril in our hospitals and other medical settings, in grocery stores, nursing homes....

With Holy Courage, Jesus comes through it, not without scars, but alive with power for us and the whole world. Through our darkest hour we are not alone. Our vulnerable, suffering God is with us.