

A Rough Mortal©

John 12:12-19; Philippians 2:1-13

Palm Sunday

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Oh, the excitement of Palm Sunday! After a long, long journey through Lent we finally come into worship with some joyous excitement. (Although I don't think I've witnessed too many of you looking very somber as you've entered the sanctuary, regardless of whether it is the season of Lent or the days of Ordinary Time. And that's okay because Sundays are still about resurrection!)

But we have been more reflective, our focus on God, the Potter and us as the clay. We've looked at the ways that God has worked with us, and molded us, even judged his children at times. All out of love, of course.

Today we end the series of the *Lessons from the Potter* with Jesus' life, and our lives as Jesus followers. As Christians.

We start with looking at Jesus entering Jerusalem. He had just performed his greatest miracle that convinced many witnesses that he was the long awaited Messiah. He had been in Bethany and had brought his friend, Lazarus back from the dead. Called him, after four days of being in the tomb, wrapped in his mummy clothes, to come out of that tomb. And lo and behold, out he came! The dead was now alive again.

If nothing else had convinced the people, they surely were convinced now. And it showed. Here comes Jesus, riding into Jerusalem and he is greeted by the crowds who were waving palms and throwing their cloaks on the ground in front of him, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

And yet, as much as we might want to drown them out, we hear those other voices – the ones that point to a completely different mood – the somber, passionate, suffering that was coming soon. The temple leaders who were threatened by the loyalty and the excitement of the crowds for Jesus are looking on. Watching it all with disdain.

"You see," the Pharisees said to one another, "You can do nothing. Look! The world has gone after him."

Yes, look! Look again at Jesus. Here comes the one the "world" the Pharisees proclaimed, exaggerating, is so sure will save them from the oppression of Rome. The Messiah. The King. Riding in to the city majestically – on a horse.

Oh wait. No. It's a donkey.

Oh, look again. It's a *colt* of a donkey. Look! His feet are almost dragging the ground.

So, maybe he doesn't look like royalty. Yet, anyway.

The truth is, even those who were so excited to see Jesus when he entered the city of Jerusalem for the Passover, even they were turned in anger by the end of the week.

We, who are on the other side of the cross, who know the rest of this story, I think have a difficult time grasping the energy and the emotions of that week. If we could put ourselves in that street, palms in our hands, waving and cheering, hopeful that the day of the Lord's salvation for the Jews was breaking through, feeling sure there would be a revolt, nervous perhaps about what would take place, yet very excited that God was finally going to intervene in their oppressive situation – if we could just forget about Easter we might be able to feel what it was like that day.

But, thank God, we cannot forget about Easter. It is why we are here. It is why we live as we do, right? It is why we go through the 40 days of Lent, why we are willing to begin this day with joy and yet go out into the darkest week ever with at least a heaviness in our spirits knowing what our Lord endured that week to get us all to the joyous victory of Easter.

It is why we are in awe of who Jesus was and is. And it is why we, as Christians, try to model our lives after the one who gave his life for us.

It is, believe it or not, why I titled this sermon "A Rough Mortal."

Throughout Lent, the focus from the *Lessons of the Potter* have been about walking in Jesus' footsteps; about "having the mind of Christ," as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Philippians.

Looking back, starting on Ash Wednesday, our themes were about *yielding to God, surrendering* ourselves to our Creator, *trusting* our lives to him. And in that we heard that we are *beloved* and *redeemed*.

In all of those themes, except the last we know from studying Jesus' life that he yielded and surrendered himself to God, the Father. He trusted God's plan.

God's voice boomed out that Jesus was his beloved Son. And through Jesus' obedience to God's will, he accomplished redemption for a sinful world who had broken the relationship with God.

Paul reminds us that, (and I'm reading from *The Message* now) "Jesus had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* (*A rough mortal*)

Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.”

That is who Jesus was. Isaiah called him the “Suffering Servant.” Jesus called himself a slave. This is the picture we see of Jesus, the mortal on earth: Humble, selfless, sacrificing, spending his time loving and caring for and healing the sick, the outcast, the poor, the sinners. He was forgiving, he stood up for refugees and prisoners and he commanded that we do the same.

His greatest commandment was to love God with our whole being. How could we sin if we did that? Loving God before all else would mean we put ourselves in God's control, we put ourselves below God. Nothing else is as important as being in God's will. Not ourselves, our jobs; not our money; not even our families. God first.

And then Jesus told us to love others; love our neighbors; love and forgive those in our friendship circles – but that's the easy part, because he also told us to love our enemies. He gave us examples of loving and forgiving through stories like the story of the Good Samaritan where all these upstanding religious people crossed over to the other side of the road when they saw a man who had been beaten and left to die. And then, a man who was hated and looked down on in society – a citizen of Samaria, the place where Jews would go miles out of their way to avoid entering – that was the one who helped. He is the one who showed his enemy love, compassion and mercy. He is the example of how we should live.

Paul says we are to be of the “same mind as Christ,” the Rough Mortal who came to earth, leaving all his Godly status behind to save us from our sinful selves.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Paul goes on to encourage the Philippians, and even us today, saying that we should do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that we may be blameless and innocent, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which we – (who are Christ followers) – are like stars shining in the world.”

This rough mortal reminds me of one who said, “Preach Christ, and if all else fails, use words.” That quote is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who himself gave up a life of wealth, nobility and privilege to live a life of complete obedience and love for Jesus, and for all of God's creation.

I think this little plain, rough statue of a mortal kind of says it all. Jesus gave up his shining glory to become a plain human, living in poverty, loving, healing, forgiving, teaching and ultimately sacrificing everything for us.

As Christians (that is, one who believes Jesus is the Christ and who follows his teachings) we are called to live according to his example. Our lives should reflect the things Jesus modeled.

And so we come to the table with our minds and hearts full of gratitude for the grace and sacrificial love our Lord Jesus showed us. We eat the bread of life that represents his broken body, and drink the cup of salvation that symbolizes his blood that was shed on the cross for us.

We reflect on the amazing, wondrous love of a God who came to earth as a human – a simple, rough mortal like us – yet who would die to give us life.

May this meal be our strength and fortitude that gives us the courage and the humility to live as he lived.

We will come back, on Thursday, to remember, as he commanded us to do, that night when he sat at the table for the last supper – the night when he would be betrayed by one of his own.

We came here today with an air of celebration, but we leave here in somber remembrance of the greatest love and passion ever shown to the world. It is fitting for us this day, before we eat at this table, to confess our sins to God, to repent of who we have been and to ask for, and receive forgiveness, so that as we come to eat the meal Jesus provides, we come with full, immediate gratitude for his amazing grace, for our release from the chains of sin that caused us to be as broken shards lying dry in the desert.

Let us confess our sins before God and one another:

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