

Palm Sunday is a time of Paradox. A Paradox is a combination of seemingly contradictory things, that somehow point to a deeper truth. Some common examples: You often have to scrape deeper into a wound, cleaning it out so that it can heal. Psychologically or spiritually this can mean facing a difficult truth in order to find healing. Or how about the statement “Less is More!” (If the preacher goes on forever, people might fall asleep; a shorter talk can be more memorable.) Less can be more. How about the truth that the greatest home run hitter Babe Ruth often led the league in strikeouts, that success is often built on much trial and error, mistakes and failures!

One psychological paradox is that the kind of wounds we have had in life can often be the place of a growing strength. Like Moses, James Earl Jones, Winston Churchill, Joe Biden, I too had quite a stutter in younger years. Things like breathing exercises, meditation, slower speech, and singing (like stutterer Carly Simon did) all help smooth out and strengthen speech. The place of your wound may become a place of strength.

Jesus’ life and teachings involve many paradoxes... “You must lose your life to save it!” ... or “whoever would be greatest among you must be your servant” (They “who exalt themselves will be humbled,” and “the last shall be first!”) The story we just heard about Jesus on “Palm Sunday” is paradoxical: his “triumphal entry” into the Holy City is on a young donkey, one that had never been ridden. Jesus intentionally chose the young colt to make a statement, that his “kingship” was different from most earthly kings of his day. “Ride on King Jesus!” The “conquering king...” yet he was the King of Love, the Prince of Peace, not a king on a war horse that would trample every enemy. No he taught about loving enemies! Ride on, King Jesus; continue to teach us the way of humility and love, love as the strongest power in the world... the most life-changing power in the world.

On Palm Sunday, we see both story of the waving Palms and Story of Jesus' Passion.... the Palms praising Jesus and pleading with him to save them, and the foreboding Cross of crucifixion. So Christians often make Palm Crosses to remind ourselves of Jesus' paradoxical nature. On the one hand, his followers are shouting Hosanna, or Praise and Save! But the way that he will save will be through suffering love, through sacrifice, through laying his life down for the world. Most kings say do what you have to do to stay in power, to have power over others, to put self first. Jesus spoke of putting others first, of the greatest one being a servant.

Jesus' teachings were not popular then, and not now. They spoke of a re-ordering of society to make a more even playing field for all; this naturally threatens those who are in power. Jesus knew his Jewish scriptures and echoed Leviticus 19 with the sentence "Love your neighbor as yourself." And another part of Leviticus 19, (written in bold letters on the front of our local synagogue) gets harder: "*The alien who resides among you shall be to you as a citizen. Love the alien as yourself. For you were once aliens in Egypt.*" For our current situation, if this God's Way, we have no choice but to love the "aliens" in our midst to help them on the road to full citizenship. "For you were once aliens..." Sounds a bit like "For you and your ancestors were once immigrants, maybe from Europe or Canada. Surely we can find ways to help refugees and immigrants adjust and assimilate like our ancestors did. And surely such love requires some sacrifice on our part; yes, even our hard earned tax dollars to pay for more judges and social workers to go to our borders, more than military presence, to be sure that humanitarian aid is fair, adequate, compassionate, in short: extending love to the strangers in our midst.

There are many pressing societal problems. While we can't address them all, we can focus on Jesus and his Way, the Way that involves sacrifice, walking with those who suffer, paying a price ourselves, even laying down our lives for others as he did for us. By

walking with Jesus, we feel his Radiance and Glory, but we also are taught the way of Suffering and Sacrifice. I played the following song at the beginning of Lent, exactly one month ago, the beginning of this journey of the Cross, but it bears another hearing, for it portrays so well the paradox of his Glory and his Agony, the Praise and the Passion, the Crown and the Cross. We need to see the necessity of both in life, the interweaving of both. Jesus lives out this paradox in his life and asks us to walk with him.

*I walked today where Jesus walked, in days of long ago; I wandered down each path he knew, with reverent step and slow. Those little lanes, they have not changed, a sweet peace fills the air. I walked today where Jesus walked, and felt his presence there.*

*My pathway led through Bethlehem, Ah! memories ever sweet; The little hills of Galilee, that knew those childish feet; The Mount of Olives: hallowed scenes that Jesus knew before; I saw the mighty Jordan roll, as in the days of yore.*

*I knelt today where Jesus knelt, where all alone he prayed; The garden of Gethsemane, my heart felt unafraid! I picked my heavy burden up, and with him by my side, I climbed the Hill of Calvary, I climbed the Hill of Calvary ... where on the cross he died! I walked today where Jesus walked, and felt him close to me!*