

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday – April 9, 2017 Year A
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*“My song is love unknown, my Savior’s love of me ...”
May my words reveal the greater glory of God.*

AMEN

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Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

This final line from Mary Oliver’s poem **The Summer Day** became the invitation for my journey through Lent this year. My journey, now and yet to come, that brings me to the doorstep of Holy Week once again, yet different, as the journey to Holy Week seems to be each year, and seems as it should be.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? Like most poems, it is often the final line or stanza that leaves me waiting, watching, and wanting more. Rarely do poems conclude with **The End** like so many novels or movies. Although they now seem to be adopting the “**oh no, what really happened to Jack**” from the current hit series **This is Us**.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? This question continues to invite me deeper in the journey that is THIS Holy Week which we enter this day in the Sunday of the Passion or Palm Sunday. At one time, these were separate days in the journey to Holy Week. Over time have been conflated as it seems so many people cannot, or do not, walk the *Via Dolorosa*, the **Pathway of the Tears**, with Jesus. Without this story, the empty tomb come Easter Day is just ... **empty**.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? I wonder if this question was in some way the question Jesus bears into the Garden of Gethsemane. Bearing his three-fold prayer from the place of salvation from what was to come into surrender that all this would come in God’s glory alone. Hearing Matthew’s Passion Narrative, this captures the question on the hearts and lips of those crowded around Jesus as he enters the holy city Jerusalem.

The disciples look at the swelling crowd of believers, condemners, and wanna-be’s, knowing soon they will receive their rightful reward for faithfully following Jesus as rulers in God’s kingdom come in this promised Messiah. Little did they know that they would be scattered among the dark, dank, garbage strewn alleyways of Jerusalem, fleeing from the condemned Jesus, fleeing for their lives. **What do you seek ... why are you here?**

The Pharisees and Sadducees know their reason for being here this day. Trying to keep a safe and holy distance from the unwashed and unruly rabble that follows this self-proclaimed prophet

Jesus, they ardently study their precious 613 laws of the Torah. No doubt the Law would reveal this Jesus as nothing more than another insane, delusional, narcissistic, and blasphemous rabble rouser. Soon they would have all the evidence they need to convict him by their laws and Roman Law to maintain control of all that God had given to them to keep against the likes of this Jesus. Yet there is the lingering feeling within them, something about Jesus, just something about him. **What do you seek ... why are you here?**

Look at the dereliction of humanity that follows with palm branches in hand, singing *Hosanna* with joy glorifying this would-be Messiah's return. Wait a moment, is not that Bartimaeus? He has been blind for as long as I have known him, but now his eyes are wide open as he dances in delight! And is not that the woman whom no one could heal her hemorrhage? She stands erect, filled with health and joy! Look at all the ones carrying crutches held high, walking and dancing and leaping. Look at those holding the lepers clothing before them with skin now like that of a baby. Are not those prostitutes, and that demon possessed Mary of Magdalene? Why are they following this Jesus? **What do you seek ... why are you here?**

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? I offer my Lenten invitation to become yours. We hear the Passion Narrative as one by one the characters stand, some right next to you, many whom you know as friends in faith through our parish family. They speak words of betrayal and condemnation. Then WE ALL STAND before the Judgment seat of Gabbatha and join the chorus **"CRUCIFY HIM!" WE ALL STAND, but not too close. WE ALL STAND** at the hill of Golgotha, at the foot of the Cross, **but not too close.**

We both desire and resist God's movement toward us, a movement that brings us blessing and life, but costs not less than everything. We remain ambivalent about this, yet we are these same ambivalent creatures longing for union with the One by whom we are united with our Creator. Fiercely determined to make our way with the very freedom the Creator grants us, it is to us that God in Christ comes with a fierce love as king, as servant, as reconciler, as a robber of the tombs into which we fall, and as bread for the world, bread for everyone.

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In April 1957, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King stood in the pulpit at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. On this day, the Sunday of the Passion in this year, Dr. King focused on the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. On this Palm Sunday in April 1957, here is what Dr. King said ...

"One must learn to make the transition from "let this cup pass from me" to "nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done." And God grant that as you face life with all of its decisions—as you face the bitter cup which you will inevitably face from day to day—God grant that you will learn this one thing and that is to make the transition from "this cup" to "nevertheless." ...

This, you see, is the thing that determines whether you go through life devoted to an eternal cause or whether you go through life depending on your own finite answers, which really turn out to be no answers at all. This is the thing that determines whether you can rise out of your egocentric predicament to devotion to a higher cause. This is what Jesus was able to do and this is the lesson that he presents to us today.’

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

AMEN