

Palm to Passion Sunday: April 10, 2022
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“Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope.”

What an enchanting Biblical phrase – “prisoners of hope.”
It doesn’t come from the Gospel reading, at least not literally,
or even the epistle,
but from our very first reading on this scripture-packed day,
the Old Testament prophet Zechariah read during the liturgy of the palms.
Clearly the gospel writers were familiar with this passage.

The immediate circumstances of the prophet Zechariah
were roughly five hundred years before the time of Jesus, right after
the Babylonian Exile when the people were coming back to rebuild Jerusalem.
They were looking to be a strong independent nation,
not a broken vassal state. To be led by their own king, not an occupying force.

Into this time of dislocation and despair,
the prophet Zechariah paints a picture of a king to come
who’s both triumphant and humble.
One who comes riding a donkey, a colt, a foal – anything but a warhorse.
Zechariah conjures a Prince of Peace.

Then, he calls the people “prisoners of hope” --
“Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope.”
Urging them to look beyond the present to possibilities.
To work for justice in the midst of an unjust occupation.
To expect the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

You can see how people in Jesus’ time, and throughout the ages,
would also be inspired by these words of Zechariah.
How Christians might associate Zechariah’s prophecy
with Jesus entering Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday.

I would contend that we too are called to be “prisoners of hope” –
people who despite plenty of reasons for despair,
can’t help but hope.

Yes, our lives have been largely displaced by the pandemic.
 Yes, we are depleted by it.
 Yes, our nation has profound unresolved racial and economic injustice,
 our very democracy is at risk,
 and we have much work to do to make it right.
 Yes, we all carry our own burdens.

And, yet, we can't quite escape from the Christian hope, the promise
 of newness and fullness of life as we await the coming of Christ in glory,
 and the completion of God's purpose for the world. (Catechism, BCP p. 861)
 Because even on those days when I lose hope,
 I know you're there to hope for me.
 And on those days when you're beyond hope, we're here for you too.
 We can't help but stick with hope, despite the odds.
 We're "prisoners of hope" -- hope in God's Word made flesh, Jesus.

We're prisoners of hope just being here today.
 After two years of not being able to have a full-fledged Palm to Passion Sunday,
 we're out of practice, out of step.
 And yet here we are taking even baby steps together, as prisoners of hope.

We're prisoners of hope
 when we're concerned about rising prices
 not just for ourselves but especially those most vulnerable,
 so we dig a little deeper to give a little more
 (as many did, even in the rain, at yesterday's drive-thru.)

We're prisoners of hope
 when we don't just fret about people in trouble –
 be it the sick child down the street or
 civilians half-way around the world in Ukraine –
 but pray for them, commend them to the care of God who is our hope.

We're prisoners of hope
 when we shout "Hosanna" one moment
 knowing that we'll soon shout "Crucify" --
 all the while trusting that there's an "A-word" in our future this time next week.

We can't help but be prisoners of hope as we approach Good Friday,
professing that Jesus endured the worst this world can visit,
the worst that has been done to us and that we ourselves have done,
and yet redeemed it all in love.

We're prisoners of hope
whenever we say "I'm sorry" or "I love you",
or whenever we show up wherever we're needed
even though we don't know what to say.

We're prisoners of hope, frankly,
when we sincerely pray the Palm to Passion Prayer we'll offer in a moment;
when we hope against hope that
the parts of our lives that are dying and dead
can be made new.

We're prisoners of hope,
locked tight, safe and secure,
and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the key.

This week, this Holy Week, return to Jesus your stronghold,
O prisoners of hope.

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