

The Pause

The Liturgy of the Palms

Luke 19:28-40

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29

The Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:14-23:56

Psalms 31:9-16

Last week, if you recall, we discussed the beauty of the ampersand. This week, let us consider the role of the semicolon. A semicolon is the punctuation in the middle of a single sentence, which connects two independent clauses, two thoughts, or ideas. A semicolon is a pause in the middle. Today is Palm Sunday, and liturgically, we find ourselves sitting on top of a semicolon. Our readings leave us on the sabbath day, with Jesus lying in a tomb, pausing between the crucifixion and the resurrection. And we are waiting in this pause with the disciples. After the flourish and hype of two separate, but equally frenzied parades, one with Jesus lauded as a god and the other condemning him to death, this silence, paused outside the grave can be unnerving.

We encounter many characters in today's stories, so many personalities and so many emotions. The people all seem moved by some unseen current, driving them on through a wild cascade of hope and joy, ambition and posturing, fear, anger, and grief. The only person in all these stories who remains in full possession of himself, not victim to the emotional churning of the events, is Jesus. Heralded as king, the praise of the crowd does nothing to stir his pride or make him raise a fist in triumph. Castigated as a blasphemer and criminal, the crowd's jeers did nothing to sway his resolve. David, Isaiah, and Paul all clearly illustrate Jesus' intentional choice to take the cross upon himself for our sake. As frenzied as the mob was, as cunning the characters doing the political and religious wrangling, Jesus was not tossed into the fray of human activity, he placed himself in the middle of it, taking deliberate steps leading to calvary. We may feel disoriented and

unsettled by the force of the currents that seem to dictate these events and their sudden and complete halt, but Jesus was not.

We follow this flurry of activity with the mobs crowding the streets, we watch his death and burial, and we know the resurrection is coming. But for now, we find ourselves hovering over the semicolon. Forced to pause, to wait, watching for the second half of the sentence, trying to make meaning of an incomplete story, but stuck in the middle. We wait outside the tomb, a forced pause, grieving.

Some religious traditions pile the guilt onto this grief. You filthy, dirty, sinner. You are the reason Jesus died, feel bad, feel very, very bad, here is a stick with which to beat yourself up and I will pile it on as well, you scum. While some partial threads of that may be true, simply beating ourselves up, is perhaps not the best use of our time waiting in the silence outside of the grave. It may be more useful for us to consider the specifics of what we are left to feel, and why, as we are suspended in this moment, separated from Jesus in death. Once we identify the sources of the feelings, we can address them more clearly and grieve them productively. Like a child saying sorry, if he cannot identify the source of his guilt, the apology holds little value and probably won't influence any change in behavior.

Part of the gift of Holy Week is the opportunity to experience the story of Christianity from various perspectives. For instance, none of us ever walked with the physical human body of our friend Jesus. We know him spiritually, but not physically. Therefore, we can only imagine what it was like to watch that body be treated with brutality or have its animation quenched in death. Additionally, we have the Holy Spirit's presence with us always, so we cannot know what it was like to feel God's presence suddenly and completely unavailable. But we take this week, to stand with the disciples and crowds, peering out from their eyes, feeling their experiences, being touched and moved by Jesus' passion from the outside, looking in.

As we grieve with the disciples, we will experience it in as many ways as there are humans sitting in this room. But, for the sake of clarifying a common experience, let us discuss that grief in three primary ways. First, we feel the grief of our own loss. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows what that absence feels like in the deepest part of ourselves. The breath gone out of that loved one's body steals the breath from our own lungs. Those standing outside Jesus' grave were probably not feeling primarily remorse over their own human failings, but the grief of the loss of the one they loved and believed they would see no more. Allowing ourselves to have our breath taken away by being witness to the loss the disciples felt at the foot of the cross is an important part of our work during Holy Week. If we allow it, that grief can lead us to gratefulness that we never have to feel that depth of loss ourselves.

The second grief we feel is indeed our own guilt, our broken relationship with God. We know from other gospel accounts that Judas, Pilate, and the centurion felt this keenly, as it was their own direct actions which murdered Jesus. Peter also felt this in a way the other disciples did not, as he grappled with his repeated denial of Christ. And we all know the depth of our own depravity, our failure to love Jesus fully. Recognizing the ways we choose to prioritize our own desires over our relationship with Jesus can help us make different choices in the future. If we allow it, the grief of guilt can inspire within our hearts a greater love for and allegiance to the God who allowed himself to die on our behalf.

The third grief we feel is the brokenness of our relationships. Our failure to love Jesus leads us away from loving others. This distance from the heart of God causes us to elevate ourselves over others, to act from pride, anger, hatred, selfishness, and greed. Identifying the specific nature of our own complicity in the brokenness of the world and the ways we have harmed others is invaluable as we strive towards repentance... as we strive toward our work to repair and heal the brokenness of the world.

One of the best parts of the Anglican tradition is our communal confession of sin. We all need to be doing our own specific confession, and I hope everyone takes every opportunity available to be intentional about their individual confessions. But our corporate confession is powerful because we kneel shoulder to shoulder, naming our grief and guilt, accepting the way our failures have impacted ourselves and the people next to us, and together we claim forgiveness. We accept the grace we need for the harm we have caused. And we cannot lay hold of that grace for ourselves with integrity when we refuse to extend it to others. We are all at the foot of the cross together. This week, especially, we wait together. We look into the eyes of those responsible for Jesus' death, knowing we too are complicit, and then corporately we shift our gaze to the tomb, eagerly anticipating the completion of this sentence, resurrection's power to overcome **ALL** our failures.

Today we pause, we grieve, watch and wait. Ahead of us is the triduum. Maundy Thursday celebrates The Last Supper, Good Friday is the commemoration of Jesus' murder, and Holy Saturday is the silent sabbath where the whole world pauses as Jesus body lay hidden in the tomb. We've spent more than a month of Lenten practices, preparing our hearts for Jesus' resurrection. What have **you** experienced? What have you learned? What treasures are you taking with you from the graveside and into Easter?

As we enter this most holiest of weeks, hovering with the semicolon, waiting for what we know comes next, may we be willing to grieve deeply and intentionally just as Jesus intentionally traveled to the cross. May our grief bring us true repentance, and may we be prepared to enter fully into the joy that awaits.