

Sermon :: 13-Apr-2025
Palm / Passion Sunday, Year C

“ Having said this, He breathed His last. ”

Three questions Jesus *never* asked as He hung, dying, upon the Cross:

One: What's in this for Me?

The death of Jesus on the Cross ... the hideous suffering of God on an instrument of barbaric torture and ugliest humiliation ... the agony of the Anointed in utter abandonment and—it would *appear*—complete defeat ... is the single most selfless ... most self-denying ... most self-sacrificial ... act ... this world has ever known. The *eternal* Creator takes up the *death* of the creature. The Author of all—“all” *including death itself!*—allows His own fate to be decided by the very characters whom *He* wrote into existence (and could, just as easily, have written out, again). The Infinite ... Originator of the cosmos, Source of all life ... subjects Himself to the puny, stunted, corrupt limited-ness of a humanity ... that ranges from, on its *best* (!), feckless and uncomprehending ... to, at its worst, vile and loathsome.

There is *nothing* ... ***not one thing*** ... ‘in this’ for Jesus vis-à-vis the ways of this world. From the point-of-view of those who witness—and *hasten*—Jesus’ death ... neither He nor His family is going to come into any fortune ... enjoy any special perks or privileges ... or bask in any fame as a result of His dying. One can’t wield any kind of power, from a *grave* ... pound the bully pulpit or sign any orders, lying in a *tomb* ... smash any self-sanctioned idols or make a nation great again, *dead*. His ragtag group of followers—whatever *remains* of them—is too small and marginal to make Him into any kind of martyr. Indeed, after He allows Himself to be killed and they limp back to their respective homes, feeling defeated and undone ... Jesus seems to be guaranteeing the *end* of the Jesus Movement.

Whether by the count of a consultant or a poll of the public ... there is nothing ‘in this’ fate *‘for’* Jesus: the very Jesus Who ... with a word from His lips or the slightest nod of His head ... *could* have stopped the world’s spinning on its axis, if He’d so wished. Some would probably look at His death—His *willing*, His *chosen* death—and nickname Him “dumb” or “crazy” or worse: “Jesus the Jackass!” “You could have had *everything* ... and You *let* them *kill* You?! What a total ***loser!***”

And yet He dies ... willingly—maybe even *desiringly* ... and *certainly* graciously ... even though there *seems* to be ... *nothing* in it for Him.¹

Two: Is this the right thing for My career?

This is a question Jesus *might* have asked *throughout* His ministry ... but never did. From the get-go, He’s been antagonizing ... opposing ... *confronting* ... ***contradicting*** ... ***openly defying*** ... the religious authorities who not only control the ‘who’s in’ and ‘who’s out’ lists of His own small, insular Jewish community in Judæa ... but also are cat’s paws of the civil government—imperial Rome—which the

¹ Of course, what’s ‘in it’ for Him will be *Resurrection*: the union of all (who profess faith) with their Creator in exactly the eternal order God has intended from the very beginning. But we do not dwell on this, *this* day.

chief priests and scribes² are endlessly anxious about and constantly trying to placate. **His** isn't exactly a way to 'get ahead' in this world, is it?

¶Now ... the *canny* politician would have maintained a stoic reserve ... smugly claimed moral superiority over his opponents' views and actions ... coolly held **himself** 'above it all' ... claimed **he** was playing the 'long game': This will all blow itself out ... and *then* they'll see *I* was right, *all along* ... and embrace me. ¶Or ... the adherent to *REALPOLITIK* would have done the calculus ... recognized her **platform**, her **position** didn't stand a snowball's chance ... and capitulated: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. ¶Or ... the ostrich ... the *denier-of-reality* ... would have kept sending anodyne messages to the folks back at home about how much *good* he was doing in the capital—symbolic bills he's sponsored; citizens' inquiries answered; schoolchildren's tours given—in order to curry favor and stave off the realization that he lacks either the will or the means to defy injustice ... stem chaos ... and prevent an all-out meltdown. None of these 'survival' tactics is likely to succeed, long-term ... especially against a totalitarian, no-holds-barred regime, like ... Rome (!). Whatever flimsy fig leaf of *so-called* leadership, of *faux* statesmanship—"Better to live to fight another day!"—they may provide ... they *actually* serve to enable and **inevitable-ize** the very things you so adamantly *swear* you *oppose*.

But in Jesus, there is nothing 'savvy' ... nothing 'calculating.' He doesn't dither in the face of falsehoods ... defend Himself when smeared or attacked ... dine with the powerful or privileged ... or stand aloof or remote, *hoping* for better days and *praying* things won't get any worse. No. Completely *ignoring* 'conventional wisdom' and tossing aside whatever modicum of respect and goodwill He's managed to engender ... utterly *disregarding* every single personal and 'professional' consequence for Himself ... He **acts** ... *now* ... in *this* moment ... at *this* inflection point ... because each day wasted in the present ... robs the future of that much more hope.

The *third* thing Jesus never asked: Do these people *deserve* this?

It's a lot *easier* ... a lot '*cleaner*' ... living in a *transactional* world, isn't it? We get to keep what we make ... aren't obliged to help anyone who hasn't already helped us ... offer credit only to those who can pay back in-full. Simply calculate the payments and potentials and—CA-CHING!—we know *exactly* how to treat *everyone*. ¶If someone **isn't like** us, there's no point assisting them ... because they'll never 'fit in' (or 'contribute' very much) anyway. ¶If someone is struggling to *make it* in this world, it's foolish to help them ... because that's throwing good money after bad. ¶If someone's unlikely ever to be in a position to make *our* lives better, they're not worth the time or effort ... because what's in it for *us*?! ¶And ... if someone has the temerity to disagree with or oppose us, then not *only* is it anathema to help them ... but we must *also* prosecute or persecute ... de-fund or deport ... them into oblivion ... lest their opinions gain any traction, to *our* detriment. The transactional world is all bottom line: measures of *wealth* and metrics of *worth* ... *people* as impersonal, indistinguishable and, ultimately, disposable *cogs* in some giant "**more for me!**" **machine**' we want to churn out as much as possible ... as quickly and efficiently as possible ... never mind the (human (!)) cost.

Only ... Only, with *Jesus*, it's *never* been ... *can* never have been ... a question of 'deserving.' From the very 'apple'³ in Eden ... to the too-slow pedestrian-in-the-crosswalk we may have cursed under our breath, driving here this morning ... we are a sin-filled, selfish people. By any *rational* reckoning of

² As they're so referred to, in Luke.

³ Technically, there is no apple in Genesis 3; it's an unnamed "fruit."

'credits-and-debits,' Jesus would have turned His back on us—as unteachable, undeserving and maybe even unlovable—a few *weeks* into His ministry ... if, indeed!, He *ever* would have chosen to walk among us, in the *first* place.

<<*beat*>>

And yet, there He hangs ... up there on the Cross. Not calculating our *worth*, but *loving* our *being*. Not measuring our *potential*, but *saving* our *souls*. Not asking if there's *anything* ... *anywhere* ... in *any* way ... **we've** ever done for **Him** ... but, instead, saying ... with His very last breath ... “This **I do** ... **TOTALLY** ... *for you.*”

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