

Sermon
The Sunday of the Passion with the Liturgy of the Palms
April 13th, 2025
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [Luke 19:28-40](#); [ISAIAH 50:4-9A](#); [PSALM 31:9-16](#); [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11](#); [LUKE 23:1-49](#)

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Luke’s Gospel tells us that two criminals were crucified on either side of Jesus. One of these criminals spoke words of derision, wondering why Jesus wouldn’t save himself and them. The other criminal rebuked him for this and turned to Jesus and said these words: Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me. We might hear these words as a plea for a “ticket to heaven”, and indeed, Jesus’s response – “Today you will be with me in Paradise” – might seem to affirm this, but there is more to remembering.

Remembering is not just about memories, or stories of people and times past. Remembering can also mean “putting back together”.

Our world is full of the opposite of re-remembering: there is dismembering happening all around us. There is stretching and breaking. It happens in our own lives, it happens in the lives of those we love, in friend and in stranger. Pieces have been scattered and lost. Sometimes it is the circumstances of life that do the dis-membering, that leave scattered pieces: grief, violence, loss, shattered dreams, disappointment, guilt, regret. Sometimes our actions, our words, our thoughts, create fragmentation and brokenness – in our own lives, and in the lives of others.

Here we are, once again, at Holy Week. We started our service today with jubilation and celebration as we recalled Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem. On this side of the Resurrection though, we know what’s coming. We feel the edge that there is to the “Hosannas”. We know that those “Hosannas” turned to shouts of “Crucify Him” when things didn’t go as many were expecting it would. Just as Jesus knew what Jerusalem meant for him, we know too, and we heard what Jerusalem means in the Passion Gospel we’ve just heard. We begin this Holy Week with the jubilation of palms held in tension with the anguish that is to

come. That tension stretches and pulls as we continue through this week to Maundy Thursday, when we recall Jesus's last meal with his friends, his humble, loving gesture of foot-washing, and the first Eucharist. That stretch, that pull, continues through the betrayal and darkness of Gethsemane and to the crisis of the crucifixion on Good Friday. Jesus stretches his arms on the cross, he is stretched to his breaking point, and we hear "It is finished". It all comes apart, and it seems that all is lost as Jesus is buried in the tomb. We know, though, that all is not lost. On this side of the Resurrection, we know that the empty tomb infused all of life with potential and possibility. Jesus showed us that love, and connection, and relationship are stronger than death – stronger than anything. He showed us that what is broken can be re-membered, can be put back together.

Buddhist teacher and author Pema Chodron describes life as continually falling apart and coming together, coming together and falling apart.

Holy Week offers us a "microcosm" of the coming apart, the pull, the stretch, the wrench of life that can leave us, as individuals broken, needing to be "re-membered", needing to be put back together. It offers a microcosm of the coming apart of our world, broken and in need of repair, of re-membering, of healing.

Jesus's ministry has been described as cruciform in shape. He is drawn toward Jerusalem, to the cross. Some see this as predestined: Jesus, born to die, to redeem us. I see the shape of the cross come out of Jesus's choice to continue toward Jerusalem. The shape of the cross is made as Jesus continues that long straight path to Calvary, and as he stretches out his arms to keep his followers with him. He stretches out his arms in love, drawing us in to relationship with God. Saying stay with me. Refusing to flee to the hills to live as a rabbi, where he would have made a difference locally, but not in the unfolding of human history. Maintaining his integrity to God's vision of love.

Jesus showed us, in the last week of his earthly life, that maintaining integrity to God's vision of love in this life will stretch and break us. There will be suffering. There will be brokenness. *And* he showed us there is a coming back together! He showed us that new life – a new creation – comes out of brokenness. He showed us that nothing is impossible with God, and nothing can separate us from God.

This changes the stretching and breaking of this life, this world for us, as followers of Jesus. We know, through the Resurrection that God holds us in all of it. The Resurrection is our reminder that the way of Jesus re-memembers us. The way he lived, his trust in God, his commitment to love, his willingness to be stretched to his breaking point, is our way to be re-membered: to be put back together. In choosing to follow Jesus – in being willing to be stretched, even to our breaking point – we find our way to healing and wholeness for ourselves, and for our world.

I like to believe that the criminal who said those words “Jesus, remember me, as you come into your Kingdom” saw this in Jesus. I like to think that he saw the injustice of Jesus’s suffering and death, and that he saw, in those moments, both a coming apart, and the potential for coming back together. I like to think that he recognized something beyond Jesus having done nothing wrong: that he recognized that Jesus had chosen to love to the end. I like to think he recognized in the brokenness of his own life of crime, that love is the way to be re-membered – to be put back together.

May this Holy Week be an opportunity for us all to feel the stretch in that last week of Jesus’s earthly life. As Jesus is stretched, as he stretches out his arms on the cross in love, may our hearts and minds be stretched. May we be reminded in the microcosm of this week, that life does come apart, and that, in and through Jesus we are re-membered, our world is re-membered. May we re-member, and be re-membered, in Jesus name. Amen.