

## Palm Sunday Sermon 2020

Based largely on a sermon from Palm Sunday 2000/2007 Posted on [April 1, 2007](#) by [Br. Mark Brown](#)

Post cards are usually innocuous enough. But in Time Magazine a few years ago there was an article on a special collection of postcards and photographs. There, on the pages of Time, were three photographs taken, in this country, in the 1920's and 30's, of lynchings: each one with a black man hanging from a tree and a crowd—a crowd of people who were *not* black.

The pictures are from a special exhibit that was at the New York Historical Society in Manhattan. They were pictures that one can't bear to look at, but that one must see. It's human beings at their very worst, at their most depraved. And that these pictures were mostly postcards sent to friends and family through the US Mail only adds to their depravity.

A jolting irony of this piece in Time Magazine was that it followed immediately on a sixty page spread on new directions in science as we enter the 21st century. The article was all about the cutting edges: superstring theory, parallel universes, wormholes, the possibility that instead of only four dimensions there may be as many as twelve. Wonderful things, fabulous things. It's full of optimism about what we can accomplish through scientific inquiry—*from glory to glory advancing*.

Now, there is no editorial comment on why these two articles were placed side by side, but it seems to me to be a knowing gesture. Time Magazine has our number.

But we *are* pretty special, after all. As one article reminds us, the human brain is the most complex thing in the known universe. We are nature's crowning glory. Nothing else we know comes close. We can conceptualize the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics. We can write magazine articles about how wonderful we are after 15 billion years of evolution.

And we can write magazine articles about how we lynch other people. We are creatures with reflective consciousness, with a level of self-awareness. And we see that we are creatures with a kind of split personality: great capacity for good and great capacity for violence, for evil.

By the way, this lynching business is related to something that seems to be hard-wired into our psyches. We are inclined by nature to seek social cohesion, to stick together. This is a basic survival mechanism, favored by the processes of natural selection. One of the ways we achieve social cohesion is to identify a common enemy, a scapegoat. We see this from the national level all the way down to the individual level. We see this in vile and depraved ways (the Holocaust, for example), and in some very ordinary ways.

Probably the most common occurrence is in conversation: we find ourselves bonding with others by speaking unfavorably about someone not present. A relatively innocuous form of scapegoating—but still a form of violence.

Back to our split personality. Today the church holds the mirror up to our bifurcated souls. Hosanna to the Son of David, hosanna in the highest. All glory, laud and honor... Crucify

him! Hang him from a tree! Get a rope and hang him from a tree. In Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we celebrate the very source of everything good and true and noble. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.* And then, we hang him from a tree—we lynch him. This is the liturgy of the split personality—for the people of the split personality.

The **scriptures** hold the mirror up to our bifurcated souls as well. We are destined for an eternal weight of glory, we are being conformed to the very image of the Son, we shall sit with Christ on the throne of heaven. From glory to glory advancing. The scriptures are shot through with this kind of language about our exaltation. But the scriptures are equally clear: *if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

What can we say about ourselves? We are extraordinary creatures, the crown of nature—destined for glory. **And** we hang Christ from a tree—Christ and all those innocent victims with whom he so intimately identifies. We deny, we reject, we destroy what is good, beautiful, true. Palm Sunday exposes the great crack in our nature as human beings, the great fault line in our souls. And Palm Sunday begins our annual reflection on what God has done about this crack, this fault line.

And what God has done to address our capacity for violence and evil is, surprisingly, to submit to it. In Christ, God has submitted to the worst form of human violence. *And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.* God's anointed one allowed himself to be lynched. *But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.*

This does not lend itself to quick and easy explanations. We can only appropriate this mystery over time. And through the lens of our own suffering, our own dying and rising again. Meditation on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ is a life's work.

The Palm Sunday liturgy has our number. The scriptures have our number. Even Time Magazine has our number. Our hearts are divided. But our hearts are what Christ has come to heal. As Christ comes among us again, as Love comes among us in great humility, let us—as St. Methodius once said—let us spread our hearts before him and not just our garments and palm fronds and leafy branches. Let us spread our hearts before him, whether they be split in two or in shreds. So that we may indeed be made whole.