

Lydia Gajdel 4.6.2020 Palm Sunday

Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your King is coming to you.

My dog Jack and I take two long walks every day. Our morning walks all look the same--the same smells; the same bush; the same dogs doing their same morning routine. But our afternoon walk is our adventure. In the afternoons we roam the streets of Chicago in search of the unknown. A whole new world opens up in front of us as we learn about our city in new ways, through never-before-seen corner stores; architecturally compelling apartment buildings; and a scent left behind by the many dogs who blazed this trail before us. This is the walk that makes social distancing a little more bearable.

Earlier this week on one of these walks we were wandering around Ravenswood when we came across a message inscribed on the sidewalk with chalk and foot long letters. "I like your lizard," it said. As Jack sniffed around I stared at it. "I like your lizard." Excuse me? That is when I looked up and saw it. The window of a second-floor apartment had been completely covered over with computer paper onto which had been drawn a wildly larger-than-life, multi-colored lizard. I realized that this message wasn't for me. It was for the child cooped up upstairs passing time by drawing lizards, compelled to share their art with the world by any means necessary, one more simple reminder that when God created this big, wide world she saw that it was good. Since then we've all been in this together.

This week we gather together as the body of Christ engaged in the journey of Holy Week. Every year, when we're not locked inside our houses, the people of Saint Paul and the Redeemer march around the block, singing songs of loudest praise to usher in the week that tells the story of our faith—the story of who we say we are as a people. It's no

coincidence that this time is marked by a journey: a walk into the unknown, into heartbreak and isolation, but finally into resurrection.

When we meet Jesus in our gospel today, we find a soul who knows what must come next, and is seemingly ready to lead the way into yet untraveled territory. But although it is untraveled, it is not unknown. As we hear in the words of the prophet who came before him: "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your King is coming to you." And with that the King sets out, followed by a band of friends who will love him and leave him, into a city that offers only torture and death. Trusting in the fact that the promise of resurrection will be fulfilled, he walked straight into it because, although he is fully divine, Jesus is also fully human and that's what humans do. We just keep going.

The human condition is marked by the inevitability of motion, moving forward into a world yet untraveled. Even in the times we pray for the earth to stop spinning or beg to skip over this part and keep moving, the world keeps going around and around and around. Marching on to a steady beat, one period of our life ends, and another begins, bringing with it a whole new set of joys and sorrows. Our constant is our journey.

As I prayed with the scripture of Jesus heading off on his donkey this week, knowing what we know about the story of betrayal, death, and resurrection, and the journey that we're all setting out on with him: a question lodged itself in my brain. Is this what it means to be human? If fully experiencing human nature means that Jesus must walk with us on the journey, experiencing that journey in its full torment of isolation, torture, and death, why not just stick with being fully divine?

My answer, and the answer of generations of Christians before me, is love.

The journey always leads back to love. Part of that love is Jesus experiencing our human condition with us, walking with us on a journey that humanity knows all too well. As we stand on the precipice of Holy Week, we are professing a belief that the journey ends with God. Death cannot overcome us, but it is life everlasting that gets the final say. Even in the face of what we know is coming this week we have faith in the resurrection, because we have lived it through and with Christ. That, as Christians, is the crux of who we are.

If we believe in the resurrection of Christ and the joy of the promise of Easter, we must be a people who believe in resurrection in our own lives—resurrection in the world that God created and saw that it was good. To journey through Holy Week is not an act of just listening to the story of Jesus' torture, death, and resurrection. It is an invitation to go deeper into that journey, and to see the places in our lives where we must trust in resurrection in a new way. This is not a story of the past, but the reality of God's presence in our lives every day.

And yet at this moment, resurrection can feel so far away. As we pray together today our world is gripped by the power of coronavirus. Beloved children of God are dying every day, and others are risking their lives to provide comfort, care, and essential services to the living who stay at home, isolated from those we love and everything that could be called normalcy. For many of us, the world is a terrifying place. Yet like clockwork Easter comes again, even in the face of a pandemic. We as Christians believe in the power of resurrection and the inevitability of every journey ending in the loving arms of our God.

Holy Week will look different this year than it ever has before. The virus has changed almost every part of our lives. It will change the way we come together as a community for our holiest day of the church year, and the way

that we understand the events of this most sacred week. Let this Holy Week serve as a reminder that fundamentally as Christians we do not believe that this is the end. We believe that the journey is long, and challenging, and complex, and that our God loves us and walks with us through it. We believe that the inescapable end of the journey is the good, is our God.

In this moment of our journey that may feel so terrifying, so isolating, I invite you to lean into this Holy Week as a time that tells the story of who we believe we are as a people, and our God's ever presence within that story. Let us not forget that even when the journey is long and challenging we are people who hope in the resurrection.