

“What Position Are You In?”  
Rev. Dr. Leah Fowler  
Presbyterian Church in Leonia  
March 28, 2021  
Palm/Passion Sunday

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John 12:12-16  
Isaiah 50:4-9  
Mark 15:1-39

What position are you in right now, during our worship? Feel free to write it into the Facebook comments. Are you sitting on the sofa? At the kitchen table? Still in bed? Is your back well-supported? Or are you more curled over, into the shape of a question mark? Notice whatever it is that is holding you up. Is it firm? Is it squishy? Are your feet in contact with the solid floor? Take a deep breath as you notice all the points of contact that are holding you up.

As we begin Holy Week, let's also take notice of our position, spiritually. Is your faith something that has kept you buoyant, afloat during some especially challenging times? Or has it been more like a rock-- something that has grounded you, keeping you from spiraling into fear and anxiety?

I notice my dog, when he is trying to get comfortable, likes to scratch out whatever is beneath him, whether that's the carpet, or the blanket he is about to lie on. But he's not really spreading anything around. He's just going through the motions. Similarly, he will walk in circles several times, and then, still in the same place he started in, curl up, making a ring of his body. Maybe he's imagining tall grasses he needs to smooth out before he can rest, but in our house, these motions don't accomplish anything. Do your spiritual routines feel like you are going through the motions, but without actually changing anything?

The gates of Jerusalem are an entry point for all of us to see where we stand in relation to Jesus, as he begins his journey to the cross. As for the followers of Jesus 2,000 years ago, at the start of the week, they were in a position of praise. They waved palm branches. They discarded their cloaks, waving them and making a carpet of cloth over which Jesus could pass on his borrowed donkey colt. They cried out, “Hosanna!” which means, “Save us now!” with the confidence that Jesus could usher in the saving changes their generation, and generations before them, had been longing for. But over the course of the week, their positions changed from that of praise, to that of persecution.

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord-- the King of Israel!” they say in one moment. The next moment, their words, “Hail, the King of the Jews” are said with malice, as they mockingly adorn Jesus with a crown of thorns and a purple cloth.

The prophet in Isaiah knew something of what it felt to be mocked. “I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide from insult and

spitting,” he said. The prophet has his back to those who are abusing him. But his back is not toward God. “I did not turn backward” to the Lord, the prophet said. Sometimes, facing God has a cost.

After Jesus was crucified, a lone centurion found himself in the position where he was seeing Jesus face to face, just as Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. “Truly, this man was God’s son!” the centurion cried out. I wonder if there was something about the centurion’s position, where his face was oriented to seeing Jesus’ face, transformed him from a collaborator with the system of domination and violence, to one who could see and proclaim the holiness in Jesus. Who did he become after that shift happened in him?

We all take positions, whether we realize it or not. We may take a position about when it is safe to worship in person, in the church again. We may take a position on whether the Yankees or the Mets are the team we should cheer. We may stand up to say that Black Lives Matter. Friday night, so many from our church took an encouraging stance in solidarity with Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islanders-- neighbors, friends, strangers-- at the vigil in Leonia. Our silence is also a position that impacts others.

Looking at the positions Jesus took in scripture, he was often turning toward people who were hungry, or hurting, or outcast, and turning away from systems of domination. I suspect if I am to meet Jesus in these times, there are people I need to face, to see, and to listen to.

Think again: what position are you in now? At home, as you have been watching, has your position *changed* at all? I wonder how the Spirit is calling forth change, if any, to your position in relation to God, to Jesus, and to the Christ we see in the face of our neighbors as we journey towards the brokenness of the cross?

If you are crying out, “Hosanna!” which means, “Save us now!”, what is it you need saving *from*?

Are you in a position where you can receive that salvation if and when it shows up for you?

What position might you take in order to be ready to rise with Christ on Easter?