

Luke 19:29-44

The Bible that I use as “my Bible” was a gift I received from a beloved friend for my 17th birthday, in 1996. It’s one of the Zondervan ones from Cole’s bookstore, with a plasticky brown fake leather cover and a colour map of *the Worlds of the Patriarchs* on the endpapers. I remember him being slightly awkward about giving it, wondering aloud if it wasn’t kind of a stupid gift—I could tell how vulnerable it made him feel. This Bible wasn’t meant to say “hey, I know you’re a Christian and you might like this,” because if that were the case, he would probably have gotten me some jewelry with a cross on it (or more likely because it was the 90s, one of those fish logos). He got me the Bible for that birthday because at that moment in 1996, we had the kind of friendship that you can only forge when you’re 17, and we knew as much as there was to know about each other. By that time in our friendship, we’d had the kind of deep conversations that don’t change you so much as they affirm you, and he would have known my searching, and my big questions. He knew me to have a curious mind that wanted to find meaning. It wasn’t a Bible that was given in any way to proselytize (he was not religious then, and he still isn’t). It was a gift he went outside of himself to choose.

In the first few years that I had it, I underlined many verses in my Bible. Looking back to prepare for today, I was curious to see what had resonated with me then. So many of the verses I underlined were the words of a counterculture Jesus: Matthew 6:1-4: do your righteous acts in silence and in secret, not to show off to others. Luke 17:3-4: When someone sins against you, forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive. Luke 11:11: God gives us what we need and loves when we are bold. I grew up in the kind of poverty that often leaves you without options, twisted up inside an unjust system. I wanted to dream with Jesus of a world that could be made different than what was through embodying a kind of radical love.

Even then, though, I know that I also believed that oneness with God, and alignment with the ways God wanted me to live could only *really* be possible for me if I could find a way to completely throw away and hide from sight any trace at all of what I was really like inside. That the purity and innocence it would take to be a person worthy of God’s guidance and blessing, or to find a place in His community, was not going to be available to me as-is. If I could be a totally different person with less anger and more self-control, who knew how to behave and didn’t say the wrong thing so much of the time, I could be good enough for God. I don’t know who put those messages there, but the message I should have heard was the one communicated to me in that gift from a friend who knew all of those bad qualities very well and had no problem at all in his mind reconciling the person he already knew and a person who was worthy of what was in the Bible. Isn’t that what the people who love us the most do? This is how God works through the wrong people. This is why teenage me loved the verses that sounded to me like Jesus was blasting the Clash in my room next to me: If you were so sure of the stories you told yourself, if you were sure you had it figured out...Jesus had a different story to tell you.

I know I am guilty of putting things off for some future, perfect time. I think we all are. We all have those clothes in the closet some future version of ourselves is going to look great in, or those changes we’re going to make to perfect our lives someday when things are some future, perfect way. Our culture makes sure that we never stop striving, and pushing, and comparing

ourselves to others. Years back, before we were married, during some small conflict I worried would blow up the image I was trying to project to him, my husband revealed the shocking news that he knew I wasn't perfect when he met me. The imperfection is never going away, and that's what the grace is for.

Author and Theologian Kate Bowler says that Lent "can make you feel like the deepest core of who you really are in your finitude, in your mortality, in your quirks and insecurities and everything that makes you feel broken, that those things still beat with the heart of God." Today we celebrate what's called the "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem. The Triumphal Entry is the story of counterculture Jesus. He arrives in the city sitting on a pile of coats on top of the colt of a donkey, with more coats spread out on the road to make a Bible-times version of a red carpet. Imagine a world leader waving out the window of a rusted Honda Civic. His followers that day called Him "King," they shouted praise so loudly that the Pharisees said, "can't you tell them to keep it down?" But in the midst of all of this, Jesus was in tears. He was crying, wishing that Jerusalem would understand the way to peace, knowing the destruction that would come because they didn't recognize it was God visiting them. Jesus knew that coming to Jerusalem at all would mean that He would die a violent death, one that many of the same people waving palm branches on that day would cheer in support of just a few days later. The path to the cross that started on that donkey is paved by stories of Jesus being facing rejection, lashing out against hypocrisy, experiencing the pain of betrayal and abandonment by the people closest to Him. But these people who made Him so angry and disappointed, who consistently fell short and got right in their own way, and who hurt Him so badly were the same people that Jesus was giving His life for. Why would He do any of this if He didn't love us, and invite us into His grace just as we already are? There has never been some other, worthier version of humanity that He was inviting to walk alongside him, there was always just *us*.

Palm Sunday is duality, and it's also durability. Our connection to God's kingdom is already part of our deepest selves and is sunken into the deepest parts of all of creation. When the Pharisees are yelling at Jesus and his followers to keep it down, He replies that if His followers were to quiet their voices, the stones themselves would cry out. There are truths so deep that the earth itself knows them. I've always loved these reminders of the ways that the very earth is God's own self—the resounding seas and jubilant fields of the Psalms, Ecclesiastes' eternity set within a human heart, Job's fish in the sea and birds in the sky who can tell you that the Lord's own hand made them, Isaiah's mountains and hills bursting into song, and my favourite of all, the trees of the field clapping their hands.

On Palm Sunday 45 years ago, author Kurt Vonnegut delivered a sermon which he concluded by saying "(p)eople don't come to church for preachments of course, but to daydream about God." May we all daydream about God today as teenagers again, believing in our deepest selves that God's radical love is inside us, and that we can use that love to change the whole world. Amen.