

**The Still Point**  
**A Time of Meditation and Reflection**  
**Palm Sunday**

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;  
**Peace on each one who comes in joy.**  
Peace on each one who offers prayers;  
**Peace on each one who offers song.**  
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,  
**Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.**

**Prayer**

Jesus, receive our love and worship.  
Show us how to give you what we have,  
for nothing is too big or too small  
for us to offer, or for you to use;  
for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever. **Amen.**

**Scripture Reading**

*Mark 11:1-11*

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Poem: “In Jerusalem”

*by Mahmoud Darwish  
translated by Fady Joudah*

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,  
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory  
to guide me. The prophets over there are sharing  
the history of the holy ... ascending to heaven  
and returning less discouraged and melancholy, because love  
and peace are holy and are coming to town.  
I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself: How  
do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?  
Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up?  
I walk in my sleep. I stare in my sleep. I see  
no one behind me. I see no one ahead of me.  
All this light is for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly  
then I become another. Transfigured. Words  
sprout like grass from Isaiah’s messenger  
mouth: “If you don’t believe you won’t be safe.”  
I walk as if I were another. And my wound a white  
biblical rose. And my hands like two doves  
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.  
I don’t walk, I fly, I become another,  
transfigured. No place and no time. So who am I?  
I am no I in ascension’s presence. But I  
think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad  
spoke classical Arabic. “And then what?”  
Then what? A woman soldier shouted:  
Is that you again? Didn’t I kill you?  
I said: You killed me ... and I forgot, like you, to die.

## **Meditation:**

In Mark's telling of the Palm Sunday story, Jesus enters the temple and "looks around at everything," and then leaves the city. This detail might provide a lens through which to wonder about Jesus' own experience, rather than observing him as the crowd does, the king entering his city in triumph. In all of the gospels, Jesus tells his friends that his journey to Jerusalem will lead to his death, a claim they cannot accept. From the outside, his visit to the temple might seem like a validation of the crowd's, and his friends' understanding of him as a king. At the time, the temple was envisioned as God's dwelling place on earth. It was splendid and imposing, and yet its destruction would happen within a generation, a destruction Jesus foretells, as he does his own death and resurrection. What does he see when he enters the holy place at the center of the holy city?

The poem, by the Palestinian Muslim Mahmoud Darwish, is filled with allusions to the three faiths of Jerusalem. The poet himself was arrested and imprisoned for reading his poems without a permit, and ultimately ended his life in exile. He reflects on the experience of being in the holy city, belonging and not belonging, where the light is for him, but he is "carrying the earth." His voice can add richness to our understanding of the age-old complexity of the city that has always been a place of ultimate holiness and intractable conflict.

## **Questions for Reflection:**

What are your early memories of the Palm Sunday story? What emotional resonance does it have for you? What do you see in this version of the story, this year?

Though this was certainly not the poet's intention, it is possible to read the poem as the inner voice of Jesus during his last days in Jerusalem. If you read it this way, what do you see that you might want to carry with you into Holy Week?

The poem has its own integrity as the reflection of someone who experiences oppression in his own homeland. What insights might it offer you as you reflect on events in our own country now?

## **Prayers**

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**