

Palm/Passion Sunday, March 20, 2016  
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church  
Luke 19:28-40, Luke 22:14-23:56

## Two to One

Two gospel readings today: Two gospel readings from Luke: the first includes shouts of people acclaiming Jesus. The second includes shouts of people, deriding Jesus. Two gospel readings: one leading to a procession with palms, one leading to an execution on a cross.

Two rulers. Two rulers collude in Jesus' death sentence. The gospel of Luke uniquely includes a detail about these two rulers, Pilate and Herod. The first one, Pilate, can find no basis for accusing Jesus. Neither can Pilate find it in himself to stand up to an angry crowd. So Pilate passes off responsibility, passes Jesus over to another ruler, Herod. Herod, that fox. Herod is eager to see Jesus. Herod likes to be entertained. Herod is hoping that Jesus will do some sign. When Jesus is silent, Herod sends him back to Pilate. Pilate repeats his verdict: Still he cannot find Jesus guilty, and now, Pilate adds, neither can Herod. Neither can either do what is right.

They could be us, these two rulers, as they say, "There's nothing more I can do." We say that too. These two could be us, they could be our rulers, these two politicians who have hated each other, until this, until they are joined by this. Luke's gospel says that this made them friends. They were enemies until then, Pilate and Herod, but after this they became friends: after doing this, or, rather not doing this, not doing justice. Two rulers, who mock innocence, who do nothing in the face of false accusations, who stand aside and watch what is good die.

Two criminals. Jesus is led away to die, with two others, two criminals. The two criminals have two very different things to say, as they hang on either side of Jesus. The first criminal joins in the mockery. He is hanging there, the first criminal, helpless to do anything but die, still he hangs on to his wrath. Blind to what is happening, he uses his dying breath to spit out one final shot, one last, bitter line: "Jesus, why don't you do something!" That first criminal, the criminal who mocks, who derides—that could be us, too. That could be us, hurling accusations, hanging on to our anger until our dying breath. That could be us. That often is us, hanging there. In our wretchedness, we do not see the wrongs that we have done, and we do not see the Son of God, hanging there beside us.

The second criminal sees, and says something else. The second criminal speaks with contrition, and with a request. The second criminal says what Pilate and Herod do not, the second criminal speaks the truth about justice, says, "We are getting what we deserve. This man has done nothing wrong." The second criminal speaks true, and the Christ speaks to him.

Oh to hear what that criminal does! To have turned to the Lord, and to hear this word of promise: "Today you will be with me." That second criminal could be us, acknowledging that we've done wrong, asking to be remembered, that could be us, being assured by God that we are, today, "today we are with him."

We live, and we die, by this, by God. Dying by us, dying right in the middle of us, God gives to us, rulers and criminals, God gives to us forgiveness, whether we know it or not: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

To us all today: one sign, one ruler of all, in heaven and on earth, one God, one gospel: forgiveness.