

Palm Sunday 2021  
 Pax Romana vs. Pax Christi  
 Mark 11: 1-11  
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 St. Michael's and All Angels, Lansing  
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The Peace of Christ or the Peace of Rome?  
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 Pax Romana or Pax Christi?  
 Which side are you on?

The Peace of Rome equals empire, money, influence, authority and a buying into a system that took care of an elite few. Pax Romana.

The Peace of Christ—is about who Jesus was with: peasants without land, poor people living on the edges, the overlooked and underpaid essential workers of the day. Shepherds, minimum wage earners, blind people, deaf, slaves, women without husbands or women with too many husbands...who was scorned...who was despised...it seems that's where Jesus' focus lies. Pax Christi.

On that first Palm Sunday day, Pax Romana and Pax Christi are on something of a collision course.

After spending three years preaching and teaching throughout the region, Jesus enters Jerusalem a final time. He comes to the city, a city on a hill, the city of ages, with crowds all around.

It's Passover, the holiest of Jewish festivals. A time when the Jewish people remember ages ago that YHWH heard their cries, understood their pain as an oppressed people in Egypt, a people in bondage who took action. This is a time when the Jewish pilgrims from around Palestine journey to Jerusalem to celebrate together, as God's chosen people, God striking an oppressive government and giving freedom to them. Thousands come to Jerusalem to remember, some come with a longing for change.

Jesus' disciples and followers come to Jerusalem hoping, waiting and longing for him to show that he is the one for whom they have been waiting. They come with the prayer that he will rally the people and once and for all time throw off the yoke of Roman oppression.

So when he asks for the colt to ride on into the city, the devout among them remember an image predicted from the prophet Zachariah:

“Look your king will come to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and riding on a colt...He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from

Jerusalem. The bow used in battle will be cut off, he will speak peace to the nations. His rule will stretch from sea to sea...”

They find the animal tied to the tree. They take it, Jesus sits astride, the people along the way rejoice and delight. His disciples think to themselves “Now is the time.”

Meanwhile, the Feast of Passover is also marked by Rome. This foreign government oppressing the Hebrew peoples, is very clear about this religious festival. For the Roman occupiers this Jewish holy day is not about unleavened bread and sips of wine, but rather a gathering of thousands of people, collectively remembering when an oppressive ruler was overthrown. They see thousands of people who may decide that now is the time to riot. They will not be left unprepared.

As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, so too do the Roman legions from the coast: hundreds and hundreds of soldiers on grand horses, burnished leather and gleaming swords. Undeniable symbols of Roman’s power to keep her peace: Pax Roma.

Jesus on the colt, his sandals sliding in the dust enters through one Jerusalem city gate and the Roman legions enter through another, a collision course set: the Peace of Rome vs. the Peace of Christ.

Can you see it all?

There is a similar choice that remains today, my friends. There is a status quo, perpetuated by powerful lobbies, in particular the National Rifle Association that says, it is not within our rights to protect the people in our country, the women in our country, the children in country, the men in our country from brutal, deadly mass shootings.

Pax Romana maintains the status quo. At what cost? And with whose lives?

Why is it in Georgia that it is now illegal to give someone food or water as they stand in line to vote? Here in Michigan bills have been introduced in our state legislature seeking to prevent the secretary of state from posting applications for Absentee Ballots on line. Pax Romana lives in fear of change.

Pax Christi—the Peace of Christ seeks an unsettling change for some of us. God in the person of Jesus Christ, calls all to break bread, all to be at the table, welcomed loved deciding even on the menu. The Peace of Christ does not happen the way Jesus’ followers thought it would. Rome wasn’t overthrown in a gleaming moment, violence and fear did not rule the way.

Instead, the Peace of Christ which passes all understanding, rode the colt into the city, and broke bread with believers who would betray him, deny him and run from his death. But Jesus Christ stayed, he was tortured, crucified, died. And at that moment on the hill of skulls it seemed as if Pax Romana prevailed.

But we know better, for on that third day everything changed.

Friends, in this time, in this place, in this Holy Week, we again stand in the crowds and watch. My question for all of us is will our lives, our loves, our actions reflect the fear and status quo of Rome or will seek change, relinquish fear and embrace a love which passes all understanding. The choice is ours.

Amen.