

The Palm Sunday readings juxtapose the two key events at the beginning and end of Holy Week. In the first, Jesus is hailed as King. In the second, he is scorned, denied, condemned to torture and death.

Or if we take it out of the passive voice and put it in the active voice: We, ordinary people, look at Jesus, God's revelation of Godself, as King. And at the same time, we, the same ordinary people, look at Jesus, God's revelation of Godself, as someone to be scorned, denied and condemned.

This contrast invites the question: what is *your* image of God? Wat is jouw *Christusbeeld*?

Ruler and King?

Or an object of scorn, or blame?

Or vulnerable and broken?

Luke tells us that "the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen".

Praising God for the deeds of power they have seen. Their image of God is one who is powerful. Who heals, casts out demons, even raises the dead. This is a King who is going to liberate them from their Roman oppressors. Who will be a way more effective King than the corrupt and immoral Herod. This is an image of Jesus, of God, as powerful.

There's a children's worship song that I sometimes like to use which goes like this: "My God is powerful. He stands invincible. I will hold on to him. Through God, I will overcome. He's the rock that will never move. I will hold on to him."

These words are true. And I like it because it teaches us and encourages us to put our trust in God even when life is tough. That kind of faith can really help us get through difficulties.

At the same time, it's incomplete, and therefore problematic.

Images of God as powerful shape our theology of power and how we relate to power. They shape the behaviours we value. The characteristics we associate with leadership.

The kind of people we choose as leaders.

The voices we amplify and the voices we silence.

What we think of as "godly leadership" risks being outworked in a use of positional power in a way that is unhealthy. When we're unable to challenge and rumble with power dynamics, whether in the church, in academia, the workplace or the home.

When we notice that our culture is listening to some people, but not to others – that is when we notice that our idea of godly leadership might be incomplete.

That's why it's interesting that the image of God as powerful is complemented this evening with another image of God. *Een andere Christusbeeld*.

A Jesus who is the scapegoat. The one to be blamed for stirring up trouble. The one who has no friends left.

The one who hangs on a tree and is, as far as the gospel leaves us at this point, defeated. His mission apparently a total failure. This is also God.

Palm Sunday invites the question: How might the image of a defeated, vulnerable, broken Christ inform our theology of who God is?

Let's notice these two *Christusbeelden* at the beginning and end of the week.

And let's not skip through the events of Holy Week as only a vehicle or device for God, in God's power, to accomplish God's purposes. Let's notice the two events that bookend the week. And enter into Holy Week with a commitment to sit in the space in between.

Holy Week is an in-between space.

The theologian Shelly Rambo challenges traditional western theology that elides this, what she calls the "middle place". She reminds us that Holy Week is a place of trauma.

Liturgies that sing Hosanna on Palm Sunday and rush to the victory and resurrection of Easter Day, or that instrumentalise Holy Week, can seem painful, premature, even nonsensical in the midst of trauma.

Trauma-informed theologies humble us. They challenge our neat boxes in which to contain ourselves, our world and our God. In doing so, they create a more spacious theology about what is "too wonderful" to know by logic alone.

The teacher and counsellor Stephen Levine, in his work on grief, said that "*the task of therapy is not to eliminate suffering but to give a voice to it, to find a form in which it can be expressed.*"

Can this be true of how we approach Holy Week?

If we, the church – the people of God, run away from discomforts, we risk continuing to silence the traumas of others and ourselves. That failure to validate the reality of lived experience can continue to cause pain, prolonging Holy Weeks into and beyond Easter.

But if we, the church – the people of God, can give a voice to our own traumas and be inclusive of the voices of others, we begin to honour them, rather than being dismissive.

This is the way of the cross. This is the journey of Holy Week.

How God invites us to do this will be different for each of us.

It could be that this is a time for self-reflection. We might be invited to examine the in-between spaces in our own lives. How we have been wounded, how we have wounded others. This is the way of the cross.

Or it could be that this is a time to sit with others in their in-between spaces. I find myself thinking of people whose children have had hospital treatment for life-changing health conditions. One, the gift of a new heart. The other, the cure of chemotherapy, but which has other unwanted effects on the body.

They and their parents sit in in-between spaces, their immune systems suppressed, unable to see friends. They have suffered a traumatic event and yes – there is hope – but this Holy Week, they sit in the middle place. This too is the way of the cross.

Or maybe you are called to pray for God's world. As creation continues to be in crisis, and the horrors of Russia's war in Ukraine worsen, maybe God's invitation to you is to not become de-sensitised or to give up. But to continue interceding for this world in its in-between spaces, its Holy Week. This too is the way of the cross.

Let us pray for this Eucharist that we are about to make together, and for our Holy Week.

We pray for a closer union with Christ in his suffering and in his glory. True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. Amen.

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