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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary

[Luke 19:28-40](#) (at the Liturgy of the Palms)

[Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)

[Psalm 31:9-16](#)

[Philippians 2:5-11](#)

[Luke 22:14-23:56](#)

or [Luke 23:1-49](#)

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross; and therefore God has also highly exalted him.

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I've been thinking lately about glory.

Over the past few weeks many of us have been hearing a Ukrainian phrase we might not have heard before: *Slava Ukraini, heroyam slava*: "Glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes." It's a nationalist slogan that's become the kind of motto of the Ukrainian defense. President Zelensky uses it at the end of inspirational videos. Politicians from Boris Johnson to Nancy Pelosi have echoed it. It's a style of language that's at home in the former Soviet Union, where the map is dotted with monuments to Hero Cities from what we know as World War II but what's known there as the Great Patriotic War.

Now the descendants of those who defended the USSR from the Nazi invasion are fighting one another and claiming the legacy of that glory in very different ways. Zelensky and the Ukrainians speak of the glory of the brave and noble underdog, those defending their homes against a brutal and powerful invader; the glory of freedom and independence and an open society. On the other hand President Putin began this war in search of another kind of glory: the glory of power, of expansionism and empire, of enlarging one's territory and recapturing the faded status of a superpower.

The glory of the conqueror, over against the glory of the liberator.

Scripture talks about glory as something that belongs to God: a kind of luminous, radiant quality that emanates from God's presence. The Hebrew scriptures talk about glory as something almost with weight and heft to it, something you could feel, like the heaviness of a royal robe. The glory of God in heaven; a glory that Jesus laid aside when he chose to take upon him the form of a servant, to be born in human likeness.

He came to a world where people chased glory much as they still do today. The glory of Rome was the glory of empire, the glory of a superpower, but also tinged with something of the divine status. Eternal Rome was favored by the gods, its emperors beginning even to call themselves gods. Pontius Pilate was the emperor's representative, commanding soldiers whose spears gleamed and whose armor intimidated.

And when Jesus came to Jerusalem the crowds sang songs of glory: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord; glory in the highest heaven!” They hoped he was the one who would set them free from occupation and reign as a good king who would bring justice and freedom and prosperity. They hoped he would clothe himself in the glory of the liberator.

But instead he went to the cross.

Herod clothed him in an elegant robe, but only to heighten the irony, to make him look more the fool as he sent him back to Pilate, as the legionaries laughed at him and beat him. Instead of rising up to free the people, he emptied himself and accepted an unjust death. Where is the glory in that?

This week we have seen scenes of terrible brutality on the streets of Bucha and other towns outside Kyiv. Civilians becoming the victims of rockets or snipers or even executed in cold blood. Lives ended abruptly, without reason, without justice. It is another example of the terrible truth that in this world, very often, evil has its way with the innocent. And there is no recourse, not for these people. The defenders of Ukraine may fight harder, may recapture villages, may even prevent some such atrocities from happening. The glory of the liberator is far better than the glory of the conqueror. But even a liberator can't bring back the dead, can't bring justice to those who have already had it ripped away from them. No gun or tank can do that. And of course in the large scheme of history liberators always face the temptation to become conquerors themselves.

Jesus left the glory of heaven, the glory of eternity, to be one of us. He refused to seek the false glory of the conqueror. He didn't even take up the genuine but lesser glory of the liberator. He had a different mission, one that would bring hope not just to those of his people who managed to survive the Roman occupation, and not just for the rest of their fragile and uncertain lives on earth. He came to fight death itself, not by dealing it to his enemies, but by accepting it from them, for his people, for us, and even for his enemies themselves. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There is hope for those precious children of God who lie slain in Bucha, not any normal earthly hope, but hope deeper and eternal. Hope for the elderly couple for whom the end came quickly on a park bench in Kharkiv, hope for the scared Russian kid in a cramped tank he never chose. Hope for everyone whose suffering goes unliberated in this life, hope also for the less spectacular but still genuine tragedies of our own lives. There is maybe hope even for the Pilates and Putins of this world, if their hearts can ever be turned, if they can be cracked open by the one who prays for their forgiveness, who has died and who yet lives. For he chose the glory of a servant, which is the true revelation of the glory of God.