

Sermon, *Jesus in My Life*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels Palm Sunday 4.13.25

Palm Sunday is one of the hardest Sundays to preach. Earlier this week, a grieving widower asked me this question: *why did you decide to dedicate your life to following Jesus?*

For today, I'd like to simply give you a reflection on Jesus in my life and attempt to answer that question.

When I was twelve years old, I liked the law. It's no surprise because kids in 6th grade like rules and they like to see others who don't follow the rules get punished. It was then that I thought I was going to be an attorney; and, in particular, send bad people to prison for doing bad things. Along those same lines, I read the third book of the Bible, Leviticus, and really identified with the rules and The Law. My parents, who are loving and kind, had rules. My brother and I needed to follow them and if we didn't there were consequences. Not harsh or bad consequences; but we knew the rules.

On Palm Sunday that year, for whatever reason, I was not in Sunday School during the reading of the passion. I heard it all, in church, for maybe the first time. What I heard was a subverting of the law to accuse an innocent man. And, by any measure, he was innocent with a capital I. Yet, he was handed over, crucified and died. It really shook me. After the service was over, during Coffee Hour I asked our parish priest, Fr. Winn, about the story and why Jesus died. He said he died for all of us.

That night, I had a dream. It was not the first and certainly not the last. A man came into view in my dream; this man I call Jesus. He has been with me my whole life. From time to time he shows up in my dreams. More often, however, I get a sense that while I am reading the Bible that he is speaking to me through the written word. I will bring him a question and Scripture will answer it.

In my dream, Jesus said, "I died for you." And I said I know you died for everyone. He said, again, "I died... for you." It was a personal – to me – approach. This caught my attention. If not for the trial and crucifixion... I don't know where I'd be. Probably still fascinated with the law. But, something happened there, on that Palm Sunday that got my attention.

Once it sunk in that Jesus died on the cross for me, I said: I'm not worthy. With a smile, and a lot of conviction, he said: I say what is worthy. What I call worthy is worthy. I died for you.

He went on to tell me that he has something special in store for me in my life.

When I was thirteen, I decided that the "something special in my life" was becoming an attorney and making lots of money. I know now that there are a lot of steps in between becoming an attorney and then making lots of money (and that most attorneys do not). But, back in thirteen-year-old David's mind, I had it all figured out.

When I was in my junior to senior year in college, I was preparing to apply to law school. I had another dream. This time, the same man, Jesus, showed me what my life would look like if I

graduated from law school when I was 25 years old; then when I was 30 and then 35. Basically, I got caught up in billable hours, was working a lot, was miserable but because I had extended myself financially, I couldn't do anything else that could earn me the same amount of money, so I had to continue and be miserable about it. This vision troubled me. Jesus again said that he has something special for me to do.

During my senior year, I tried applying to be a law clerk at our state supreme court and other various jobs within my major. Each time Jesus was slowly shaking his head no. Finally, three months before graduation, I went the business route. I took an entry level management job with a commercial airline. That took me on a trip, in a metaphorical, and sometimes literal sense, so that I am the priest standing in front of you today. For instance, just this morning, my assistant Linn and I put four new door mats around in the newly renovated parish hall. From my business experience, I learned a thing or two about door mats (and how important they are). Likewise, I became an expert on audio and visual equipment, I can fix the copier, I am able to understanding the concepts of marketing, advertising and management, that was all due to the journey Jesus took me on.

All the while, I was not doing exactly what Jesus had raised me up to do.

Then came Russia. Christi and I were unable to have kids. We started supporting an orphanage in Russia and eventually went on a trip to help them. We fell in love with all the kids and ended up adopting our two daughters. ... and then a few months later we became pregnant. We named our first child Ethan and then seven years later we had Elijah. Jesus had dreams for me that I could never even dream of.

The first trip we made to Russia was the most destabilizing of the trips because I was not ready for what I was going to experience. I had only been to the resort areas of Mexico and Vancouver, British Columbia (Canada). Never before had I seen such poverty and the realities of living in a harsh climate. And then came the orphanage experience which is an entirely different sermon. While in an uncomfortable, and short, hotel bed, on a cold night before the steam heat had been turned on in the city, at three a.m., in a dream, Jesus came to me with his palms outstretched and asked, "Are you ready to follow me now?" I had been stripped away of all that made me comfortable and secure. My privileges of being an American were gone and suddenly making money and career advancement and all of that took a backseat. Jesus was calling me to follow him. So I did. A couple of years later, we were packing up and heading to seminary.

You see, what Jesus gave me in that first dream after Palm Sunday was someone I could pray to and someone who I knew could relate to me. God of Creation is great, and all that, but I can't really identify or pray to God because that aspect of God is so overwhelming and transcendent. Likewise, I fully believe in the Holy Spirit and the power of the Spirit working in my life and at the church. At the same time, however, that aspect of God – Spirit – is hard for me to relate to. But Jesus. He was bullied. Cast down. He had loving and supportive parents. He had friends who would do almost anything for him. And, the same friends were the ones who also betrayed him. Jesus knew the ups and downs of life. For me, Jesus knew what it was like to be in sixth grade. I finally had someone I could talk to; to confide in; and knowing that he loves me more than I can

understand and he forgives me as soon as I begin to say I'm sorry. ... he probably forgive before I even begin to say anything but that's also a different sermon.

It was Jesus who dreamed up the Marshalls moving to Bradenton Florida and serving a beautiful congregation on Longboat Key. I could never dream that up for myself. But that's Jesus.

No matter where you are in life, or how far you have run, or what you have done or left undone in your life, Jesus is there; right now, in your life.

Fr. Winn helped me to see God in the person of Jesus Christ. I had another mentor – Bubba Smith. His real name is Darrell but he asked that we call him Bubba. He was the youth pastor at our local Methodist church. He grew the youth program into the hundreds. Bubba would talk to us about Jesus and how Jesus knows what it's like to be in High School, and to have friends, or not have any friends, he knows what it's like to be bullied and how to stand up for those you love. Bubba led us in a prayer that I prayed, and continue to pray, that I'd like to share with you now. If you'd like to pray it to, here it is:

Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, I believe you and God are One; I asked you to come into my life, to come into my heart, and to live forever inside of me. Forgive me for everything I have done. I ask you to shine your light through me so that I can learn to forgive others and to be the light in the world. Lord Jesus, come into my life and make me yours. Amen.