

“Return to Me . . .”: Preaching the Lenten Texts

Meda A. A. Stamper

Anstey United Reformed Church, Anstey, United Kingdom

Lent always, every lectionary year, begins in the wilderness. For some of us, this may sound harsh and unsettling. For others, it may sound exciting and freeing. The Lenten texts suggest that it is probably both.

The wilderness time of Lent is surely a time of disorientation – repentance, a true turning of mind and heart, must be disorienting at first -- but it is disorientation for the sake of reorientation towards what matters. And even as we pass through the wilderness, the Lenten texts suggest that we are being fed and healed and loved into wholeness, even in the most hidden, hurting parts of ourselves, so that we may be a part of God’s feeding, healing, loving work in the world. Being led by the Spirit on the Lenten way leads us deeper into our vocation, closer to our promised land.

If you ask people what they associate with Lent, many of them might think of giving things up. But the Lenten texts suggest that this is perhaps not the best way of understanding it. And I have it on good authority from a wise friend who has been “doing” Lent his whole life (which I, a lifelong Presbyterian, have not) that even for people who do give things up for Lent, it is always only about making space for God.¹ I had reached a similar conclusion based on the Lenten texts, that Lent was about finding something, the enduring treasures we read about in Matthew 6:19-21 on Ash Wednesday. The Lenten texts suggest that what we are called to give up are distractions that may make it harder for us to set out properly on the journey with Jesus, harder to see the treasures on the way and to feel the wind of the Spirit blowing over us and driving us toward the One who loves us and wants us to come home.

Sunday after Sunday, the Lenten lectionary offers us a wealth of possibilities. There are countless paths into this abundance of goodness and mercy. For each week, I have highlighted a few of the enduring treasures of the texts, focusing on the Gospel, since Lent is a journey we take with Jesus, and I have suggested ways in which they might together point to one gift of our life with God in Christ. The treasures will be ones that caught my eye because of where and who I am, but in the end, there is one great treasure beyond all of the others, and that is where we all end up, no matter what path we take through the wilderness of our Lent.

In the end, the great treasure is in the answer we find to the question of who Jesus is. The treasure is in the relationship that we build with the one who is the beloved Son, God’s love enfleshed, the giver of living water and the saving Messiah of the world, light and sight in our blindness, and finally life itself in the valley of the shadow of death and at the door to our tombs. The Lenten texts all take us to him as he approaches Jerusalem and we move toward our Holy Week.

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or *Isaiah* 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Rend your hearts . . .”: A Lenten State of Mind

The Ash Wednesday texts, which are the same every year, invite us to strip down

to the naked self before God, to rend our hearts and not our clothing, to have nothing and yet possess everything, to let go of things that do not matter so that we will have room for the only treasure that does. “Return to me with all your heart,” says the Lord in Joel 2:12. So with our whole hearts, we turn and prepare for the Lenten journey into the wilderness with Jesus.

Our preparation begins with a section of the Sermon on the Mount, which sets up a contrast between the meaningful and God-oriented and the superficial and pointless. The word translated *piety* in the NRSV (6:1) is also the word for *righteousness* – practicing piety is doing righteousness – and Jesus insists that your righteousness (almsgiving, prayer, and fasting) is not to be displayed to human beings but is to be practiced before God. “Your Father who sees in secret” is repeated three times. This is instruction about your innermost self, your hidden self. Lent is about that person.

In the climax of the passage at verses 19-21, two kinds of treasure are on offer: one vulnerable to theft and decay, one not – corresponding, on the one hand, to the quickly received and utterly meaningless reward for the hypocrites who do their righteousness as a show for people and, on the other hand, to the quiet, hidden righteousness practiced before the eyes of God who sees in secret. In the Lenten way, your whole life is reoriented away from collecting things or social status, from impressing human beings or satisfying your own need for achievement, and toward relationship and love, a reorientation that allows for transformation and hope in the face of tragedy and brokenness and sin.

The Matthew passage sits easily in conversation with the alternate Old Testament passage in Isaiah 58:1-12; both are about not making a show of worship but doing the things that actually please God – giving alms, caring for the vulnerable. But Joel too is interested in pressing for a real turning of the whole self, a rending of the heart, not the clothing.

Similarly in Psalm 51 the emphasis is on the inner person: “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (51:6). Outward manifestations of righteousness are meaningless, but the broken heart God will accept and can heal. The crushed bones of the hidden person can be made to rejoice. Again, this hidden self, the skeleton of the spirit, is the locus of Lent.

If the Psalm is a picture of inner brokenness placed before God for the God who sees in secret to accept it and steadfastly love it back to wholeness and joy, Paul offers a picture of hidden righteousness already fully formed, already alive, already brought to fullness. This seems to be where the Lenten way is taking us if we follow it.

This description of the paradox of Paul’s life of faith, like the instruction of the Gospel passage, begins with righteousness. Here, through Christ, we *become* the righteousness of God – not just have it or practice it, but become it through and through. And how that looks for Paul could be a primer for the living out of the instruction of the Sermon on the Mount. In every way Paul has been willing to be perceived as nothing in order to be something entirely different in the reality of God. The reference to the right hand and the left armed with weapons of righteousness might remind us of the references to the right hand and left hand in Matthew 6:3. Paul is beyond hiding the doings of one hand from the other; his righteousness is entirely oriented toward God so that others may see past him to grasp the goodness of grace. Paul is treated as imposter, as dead, as having nothing, when, in fact, in the reality of God

in Christ, he is true, alive, and possessing everything.

This is both deeply challenging — easier to rend clothes than to rend the heart — and deeply freeing — no need to keep up appearances, and so all of our energies can be directed toward the one who loves and saves and heals and sends us out to love our neighbor. We are free to attend to our hidden, real self because that is what matters. That is where the enduring treasure can be stored, and it is out of that hidden treasure, based on our relationship with God, that a right and loving relationship with other people will flow.

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Back to the Garden via the Wilderness

The readings for the first Sunday in Lent, where each year we join Jesus in the wilderness of his temptation, begin this year in the garden of Genesis. It is worth including the verses preceding and following 3:1-7 (2:25, 3:8). Taken with the rest of the text, they make clearer that what we have here is the advent of shame. After succumbing to the wiles of the serpent and the temptation of the tree, the man and the woman, who were unashamed of their nakedness in 2:25, find themselves in 3:8 hiding from God as he walks in the garden calling for them in the cool of the evening in one of the saddest tableaux in scripture.

Psalm 32 provides the perfect bridge between that text and the epistle with the Psalmist's move from hidden pain to forgiveness and deliverance in times of trouble, from silent suffering to safety and wisdom in the hiding place of God's love. This is the passage from which Corrie Ten Boom's famous story of hope in the stark horror of Ravensbruck takes its name. It moves us gently from the shame in the garden of Genesis 3 to the assurance of a righteousness not dependent on our frailty but on the work of God in Christ in Romans 5.

Then, in the Gospel text, we enter the wilderness and are confronted with the question that stretches across all the Lenten texts in one way or another, the question of who Jesus is. Here it turns out to be primarily a question of who Jesus is *not* as the devil explores how Jesus' divine Sonship, just assured in the baptism, is going to play out. Will he be the saving Son on Satan's terms, terms which might be more acceptable to the widest number of people (terms reminiscent in some ways of a prosperity gospel), or on God's terms, and if God's, what will that mean and how will he pull it off? Jesus responds with uncompromising obedience to God's way, and he repels the assaults of the tempter with scripture from Israel's wilderness story.

That this text reflects the wilderness experience of Israel, evoked not only by the setting but also by the repeated references to Deuteronomy in Jesus' responses, suggests that it might also point forward to the wilderness experience of the reader. His success suggests that remembering God's faithfulness is the best defense against the wilderness temptation to turn away from God's alternative way for us, our alternative citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Remembering God's faithfulness is, it seems, the best defense against the temptation to seek and collect the vulnerable treasures of wealth and CV-building as the basis for our security.

His responses also remind us what kind of savior and salvation we have. If we want to avoid the wilderness altogether, that is not on offer. If we want a saving word that endures, water in the desert, strange manna, this we can have.

The yearly repetition of this story at the beginning of Lent might suggest that Jesus is mostly a model for our Lent, that we are being led into temptation in spite of our prayer to the contrary, which he will teach us to pray on another mountain two chapters later (in the missing chunk of the Ash Wednesday text). But put in conversation with the other passages for this day, perhaps it tells a different story.

Perhaps we find that when, for whatever reason, we feel far from the garden of God's love, it is precisely then that we are met by Jesus and the Spirit, already there, waiting for us with wisdom and righteousness and surprising joy. It turns out that even there he is with us, even there his hand leads us and his righteousness clothes us (better than any fig leaves we might stitch together), and the one from whom we believed ourselves hidden, from whom we were perhaps hiding or who seemed to be hiding from us – that one was actually our hiding place all along.

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17 or *Matthew 17:1-9*
Living in the Question With God

This is a day of questions that do not have answers, answers that raise more questions, and then perhaps the realization that there are sometimes no answers of the kind we expect. There is only God's way into the unknown, God's help, God's grace and righteousness, God's love.

Abraham ventures out from country and kindred. And the writer of Hebrews will later emphasize that Abraham did not know where he was going. But he does know the Lord, and he believes in the promise of the blessing he will receive and the blessing he will be. So he goes into his wilderness, living with the questions of where and how and when, as we so often must. Then the Psalm for this Sunday affirms this trusting of the one who keeps our going out and our coming in. The Psalmist leads with a question and with the one answer that counts, the only one Abraham had, that our help comes from the Lord.

The Gospel reading, the first of four Lenten encounters with Jesus in John's Gospel, is also about what we do and do not know. The Lenten question of who Jesus is hovers over the dialogue, set against a backdrop of darkness and misunderstanding. But in spite of the darkness, because Jesus is, after all, both the light of the world and the truth, this encounter will lead to the greatest treasure of Lent, the proclamation of the gift of God's love enfleshed.

The nighttime setting, significant in John, where the Word is light (1:4) and where night falls as the betrayer leaves the table (13:30), adds to a sense that Nicodemus may well be one of those to whom Jesus does not entrust himself (2:24), those who are caught up in signs (2:23, 3:2). He comes in darkness and does not ask Jesus who he is but tells him what "we know." Jesus' series of responses undo Nicodemus' certainty because the ultimate answer about who Jesus is and who God is does not work that way. It is not reached by evaluation of signs but by relationship and rebirth into the reality "from above" by water and Spirit.

Then we find ourselves, in a sense, back in the wilderness of the first week of Lent with Jesus and Israel and the Spirit and the water from the rock, and even, in John 3:14, with Moses raising up the serpent again. Only now he prefigures a greater raising up, the only Son raised up because God, who made the world, loves it still exceedingly -- the God, who, Paul tells us in this week's passage from Romans 4,

raises the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

The dialogue with Nicodemus, which he meant to be about Jesus, becomes intensely focused on who Nicodemus himself is in relation to God -- and, by association, on who we, the readers, are. But then the confusion of the dialogue, and any concern we might have about what we do or do not know, about how to live in the questions of our lives, melts away before the gift of God's love, lifted up for all the much loved world to see.

And we are awed to be given new birth out of our darkness into his light, awed that the one who raises the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist could be calling into existence the people he made us to be and sending us out to be a blessing.

Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17:1-7;; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

The Deep Well of Lent

This is a week about water – water from the rock in the Exodus passage, replayed in the Psalm with a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation, then God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit in Romans 5:5 as a gift to us in our frailty, and finally the well and the living water of John 4:5-42.

In the second of the four Johannine encounters with Jesus this Lent, we are given the full story of Jesus' meeting with the woman of Samaria. The woman's encounter with Jesus has three movements: first, his boundary-crossing request for water from the Samaritan well, which leads to her request for his living water gushing up to eternal life; second, their dialogue about her life when he tells her "everything [she has] ever done," which leads to her determination that he is a prophet; and finally, her question about worship and Jesus' call to worship in spirit and truth, which leads to her suggestion that he could be the Messiah and his response that indeed he is.

The encounter turns on his telling her everything she has ever done. Being seen and known by him, and as far as we know completely accepted by him, opens her up to the possibility of recognizing who he is. Here is further encouragement to do what the Ash Wednesday texts suggest, to lay before God the hidden corners of the heart, which he already sees in secret, so that we can turn to him completely and know him even as we are known.

How she reacts to his revelation of himself is also important. She drops everything. She forgets about the well and the water jar and the task that brought her there. Even the living water is no longer her concern because she has recognized its source, and that is now all that matters to her. Like the Psalmist who celebrates the rock rather than the water, she has been reoriented from the gift to its source.

There is another stage to the living water experience in John, which we find in 7:37-38. There on the great day of the Festival of Booths, Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" We and the Samaritan woman do not become the source of living water, but we do become its conduit. And we see this in the next development in her story.

As a witness, she certainly does not overstate the case. She says only what she knows, and then she presents the question to the townspeople in a way that invites them to see for themselves, which is all that any of us can do. No one can know him

for someone else. Her enticement works so well that they too leave everything, as she has left her water jar. Then they know for themselves the large and wonderful truth that this is the savior of the world.

My friend with the lifelong acquaintance with Lent says that he thinks of it as a time to recapture the idea of God “digging his well in us” – that is, making space for the living water of grace to well up in us. This is certainly the week in which to offer our hearts for this purpose so that the one who knows us better than we know ourselves (and loves us better too) can pour the living water of God’s love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and we can, precisely as we are and knowing only what we know, drop everything and share it.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Seeing and Being Seen

This Fourth Sunday in Lent is much about seeing and light – about how God sees us and how the light of the world shines on us and then also about how we are made able to see rightly and how we become not only children of light but light itself.

In the first reading, the Lord instructs Samuel, who begins the passage in a state of grief and hopelessness. The Lord tells him, first, that he must move toward the future even though a future seems impossible, and, second, that he is not to assess Jesse’s sons by human standards of suitability as he determines which of them the Lord wishes to anoint as king to replace Saul. Samuel must wait as the most likely candidates are rejected one by one because “the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

The Gospel text is now the third Johannine encounter with Jesus in this Lenten season. The first two have offered the treasures of love in the form of the Word enfleshed, and living water, offered at its source so that the recipient can have rivers of it flowing through her own heart. The treasure this week is the gift of light in which to see and be seen rightly.

At the heart of the episode is the relationship between Jesus and the man born blind. The man does not seek Jesus or ask for help; he sits in silence, accused of being “born entirely in sins” because of his blindness, until Jesus, the light of the world, gives him sight. It is a story of pure grace: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see,” the blind man tells the Pharisees before they drive him out and Jesus finds him again.

The story operates on two levels, as a story of physical sight and of spiritual sight. The man born blind gradually receives both. He has been touched by grace, and then, as he is made to give his testimony again and again to resistant and threatening religious authorities, he gradually comes to a fuller understanding of the one who has touched him until finally Jesus encounters him the second time and says of himself, the Son of Man, “You have *seen* him and the one speaking with you is he.” And the man worships him.

The story of the man born blind, another of John’s long and beautifully developed episodes, incorporates the heightening conflict with the religious authorities and is also flanked by it. It follows immediately after the first attempt to stone Jesus, with the second coming soon at 10:31, and it leads immediately into the shepherd discourse, which is directed, at least in part, toward the Pharisees standing near Jesus in 9:40.

They are the thieves and bandits to whom the sheep would not listen, or at best, they are the hired hands who run away when the wolves come. That discourse about the laying down of the shepherd's life begins to set the scene for Holy Week and also might direct us back to the Psalm for this week, which is the one most associated with the young shepherd of 1 Samuel 16.

The world's most beloved Psalm surely teaches us what it means to see rightly, as people who have been found and touched by grace. The Psalmist sees God in abundance and in shadow, in quiet rest and on the rugged paths of righteousness. And that is how we are invited to see.

Like our Father who sees us in secret and the Son of Man who finds us even in our silent need, we are invited to see with the heart and to know ourselves and our neighbor and the world to be, all of us, deeply and utterly beloved.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Bones and Grief and the Breath of God

The treasure of the Fifth Sunday in Lent is life – life out of the driest, deadest stone-closed grave. The Lenten journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death in Week Four leads now into the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37 and on to Lazarus' tomb in John 11.

We may call this encounter with Jesus "The Raising of Lazarus," but the story belongs at least as much to the sisters Martha and Mary. It is they who call Jesus and lead him to the tomb of their brother. It is Martha whom Jesus reassures with one of his great "I am" statements and she who responds with what some consider John's equivalent of Peter's Synoptic declaration at Caesarea Philippi. It is Mary who lays her grief at Jesus' feet, and it is by the story of her anointing of Jesus' feet, which occurs a chapter later, that the family is identified in 11:2. So the story is as much the sisters' experience of grief and absence – Jesus does not come immediately when they call, and they both tell him that their brother would be alive if he had not delayed – as it is ultimately about resurrection and life.

It is also a story about love. Love and death are inextricably linked in John ("No one has greater love than this . . ." 15:13; "For God so loved the world . . ." 3:16), and that is also true in the story of this family. These three, along with the unnamed "disciple whom Jesus loved" of the second half of the Gospel, are the only individuals Jesus is said to love in John. Jesus loves "his own" as a group (13:1, 34), and the Son loves the Father (14:31). And then Jesus loves Martha and Lazarus and Mary (11:5). But this does not protect them from grief and death. Even after Lazarus has been wondrously raised, he is under threat because the religious authorities determine that they must kill him too since he is living, breathing evidence of Jesus' abundant life.

The challenge of this week's texts is to trust in the promise of the life abundant of Jesus in John 11 and the Spirit in Romans 8 and God's breath in Ezekiel 37 even when the tomb is closed and our bones are dry. This trusting does not mean a silencing of lament – Martha and Mary do not hesitate to speak their dismay, Martha to Jesus' face, Mary weeping at his feet. Nor is this trusting the same as knowing. When God asks Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Ezekiel gives the only answer he can, "O Lord God, you know." This trusting may be best expressed as the Psalmist's cry

from the depths and a waiting that is “more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.”

As in earlier Lenten texts, however, we also find that even in our knowing only in part, we are, by association with the one who is the source of living water and light and now life, made agents of God’s grace. The sisters lead Jesus to the tomb and take away the stone, and Ezekiel prophesies to the bones, even though they are very dry, and then he prophesies to the breath because the Lord tells him to do it.

God who sees what we are in secret, who sees the heart, who knows where we are crushed and grieving, does not only promise life. He promises to make us agents of life, deep wells of his grace, just because we are his and, relentlessly, in darkness and in light, in life and in death, he loves us.

Palm/Passion Sunday

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66 or *Matthew 27:11-54 (I have chosen to work with the alternate, shorter text.)*

Who is this?

“Who is this?” asks the whole city of Jerusalem in Matthew 21:10. Lent began on the first Sunday with Satan’s testing of Jesus’ identity as the beloved Son of God, and the question has stretched across the Lenten journey. Who is Jesus? What is the nature of the treasure that we find in relationship to him? The end of that journey and the answer to that question lies in Holy Week, and by having two sets of texts, the lectionary sees to it that we cannot rest too comfortably in the celebration of the crowd but must carry on to the cross to see the whole truth.

The Liturgy of the Palms starts us off with a shout of joy as we stand ready to enter the gates of righteousness. The doing of our righteousness described by the Ash Wednesday text has brought us here to knock on these gates, bind the festal procession with branches, and celebrate the stone that the builders rejected, now the chief cornerstone, the embodiment of God’s love. It all happens with a song of praise. The holiest of weeks begins this way.

Then the Hosannas of the Psalm are echoed in the Hosannas of the crowds welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem. And the whole city is in turmoil, literally “shaken” with an internal quake like the earthquakes that accompany Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is in this state that the people of the city ask the celebrating crowds, “Who is this?” There are two answers given here. The crowds identify him as the prophet Jesus. The narrator, who has always known that this is our Emmanuel, has identified him as the king, coming to the daughter of Zion in humility.² We will hear another answer at the end of the Liturgy of the Passion.

The Passion texts begin every year with a piece of the servant song in Isaiah 50. “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,” says the servant. As Christians, we may glimpse here the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, the teacher of Ash Wednesday, whom we have followed into the wilderness and who now sets his face like flint to go to Jerusalem. But perhaps as preachers we also find here words to pray this Lent: “Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those

who are taught.”

As we enter the Psalm for the Liturgy of the Passion, we seem to be miles away from the Palms. Here the Psalmist’s soul and body waste away in the midst of suffering, torment, enemies within and without. But even so far away from the joy and celebration of Psalm 118, where it began with steadfast love (118:1-2), so here we end with it (31:16). We take with us into the suffering of Holy Week the affirmation that in spite of everything, we can trust God, and we look to God’s shining face, God’s saving steadfast love.

In the Passion epistle reading, the Christ hymn, we are back in the definition of a Lenten state of mind, which is to say the state of mind into which Lent initiates us so that we can see and collect the treasures that we need to live out all our years. In light of all that Jesus was and became and continued to be through the pouring out of the Spirit, Paul tells us to have the mind that was in him. He, in his goodness, emptied himself so that God could fill him, and we, in our frailty, are to do the same. My friend’s deep well of Lent is for this, to be filled with God’s love so that we will be overflowing with praise and ready to join the heavenly and earthly choirs singing the name that is above every name.

With that hymn ringing in our ears, we enter the Passion. The Matthew text begins with the lingering Lenten question of who Jesus is, asked this time by Pilate, and it ends with the answer by the centurion and those who are with him watching over Jesus at his crucifixion. In Matthew’s Gospel they are terrified as they say it. The whole city was shaken by Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem; now the earth itself shakes, and the witnesses know for certain who this is: “Truly this man was God’s son.”

You cannot get the full picture until you face the cross, and so on this last Sunday of Lent, we take our first steps with Jesus into Jerusalem, knowing that he will surely die, and they will make the tomb as secure as they can, and there will be again, year after year, the dreadful silence of Saturday. But we also know that the tomb cannot hold him forever. Easter Sunday will surely come. Again and again, in the Gospel and in our lives, Sunday will come. Just as the shadow of the cross rests on our celebration, the certainty of the resurrection stands sentinel in our sorrow and our grief. Even the Passion text points forward to it already at 27:53.

So we carry both with us in Lent and always, his death and his resurrection. We carry his whole story with its treasures for us of heavenly love and rushing water of the Spirit and light in darkness and life out of grief and death. And more than that, we carry the greatest treasure of all, his presence. Emmanuel. Even to the end of the age.

Notes

1 My friend, Andrew Brereton, has a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Fordham University and is now Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs at Seton Hall University.

2 Ulrich Luz in *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 7-8, 14, points out the importance of this adjective in 21:5 for understanding what Jesus is about, and he notes the connection with 11:29. Luz translates it as “gentle, kind, mild,” which adds nuance to the NRSV’s “humble.” He suggests that the reader learns in the Sermon on the Mount what this sort of gentle attitude will mean for him or her. This idea in itself offers a way into a Palm Sunday sermon.