

## Palm Sunday (3-28-2021)

On this Palm Sunday, we hail Jesus as king. In our world, kings and other governing authorities rule by dominating their subjects, by subjecting them to their power. And often that means treating their subjects like objects rather than like human beings worthy of dignity and respect. And if their subjects object, they are forced into compliance, manhandled, subjugated once more.

Even in our nation, where we claim that elected officials exercise authority by the consent of the governed, the powerful will do virtually anything to stay in power, including subjecting people to unjust laws in order to keep them in their place. And especially if people who have been subjected before object and try to claim some power, the powers that be act to keep them in their place.

For examples, we don't have to look very far. Two days ago, Governor Kemp of Georgia signed new legislation making sweeping changes to voting laws in Georgia. It's not terribly hard to see why. Black people in Georgia had mobilized, had really stepped up to vote. There was an astronomical level of participation in this last election. This new legislation cuts early voting by three weeks, eliminates voting on Sunday, makes it illegal to provide water or food to people who are standing in line to vote, and requires forms of identification to vote that many black Georgians do not have.

There may be legitimate reasons for those changes, but I have a hard time seeing them. When Governor Kemp signed this legislation into law under the picture of a notorious plantation, Representative Park Cannon, a black woman elected by Georgians to speak and act on their behalf, objected. She knocked on the governor's door, asking to be present to witness the signing. Not a horrifying thing to ask. She merely knocked on his door. She was arrested, manhandled, physically dragged away in handcuffs and charged with a felony for knocking on the governor's door.

I wish I could say that that was terribly unusual, but even in our democracy, our republic, it's not. This is the world as we know it. This is power as we experience it and as our rulers exercise it. But the ruler that we hail today challenges our whole system, our whole way of thinking about power. Jesus, whom the people of Israel hailed as their king, whom we today in our Palm Sunday liturgy hail as our ruler, chose not to dominate

his subjects. Instead, Jesus identified himself with the least powerful among them, he became subject to the authority of the religious leaders and the political leaders.

And if you read this story in the Greek, you realize that over and over again, Jesus is handed over. That's the word in Greek: *paradidomi*, handed over. Judas hands him over. The chief priests hand him over. Pilate hands him over to be crucified. He let himself, for our sakes, be treated like an object. He was manhandled, stripped of his autonomy, mocked and ridiculed. Like the powerless people in our society, like the powerless people throughout the ages, he was beaten and brutalized to death.

It's an old old story. It's a story that we who follow Jesus have heard many, many times. And yet it is the most important story because it is the story of how God exercises power. Not through domination, but through love. Not by dominating us, not by forcing us to do anything, but by entering into our suffering and bearing it with us. And in the process, showing us what love looks like. The New Zealand Lord's Prayer that we've used frequently in this last year concludes: *For you reign in the glory of the power that is love.*

That's the power that God exercises. The power of love. That's the reign we celebrate today. May love reign always.

Amen.