

“From Empty to Full”

Luke 19:28-40, Psalm 31:9-16, Isaiah 50:4-9a, & Philippians 2:5-11

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Prayer for Understanding Holy God, sometimes life feels like a parade rushing by us as we stand on the sidelines and try not to miss it! There are hundreds of things that catch our eye, but the thing we fear missing the most is you. So slow down the speed on this parade. Paint the colors of this world a little brighter. And dance through the words in our scripture passage until it is almost impossible for us to miss you there. God we are here. We are trying to pay attention. Gratefully we pray, amen

Our Lenten theme is *Full to the Brim: an expansive life*. We have explored God’s extravagant grace that forgives, heals, unites, and welcomes everyone home. A home of vibrant relationships, ever expanding love, completing peace, invigorating joy, and abundant life. God is always loving, inviting us to enjoy an expansive life overflowing with goodness.

Life is full of twists and turns, ups and downs. Life sometimes empties us, saps our life, and leaves us crying. Sometimes we pour ourselves out in work and for others. Sometimes we pour ourselves out trying to reach a goal, complete our to do list, become the person we dream of becoming. Sometimes we pour ourselves out in tears of grief, broken relationships, tears for the ugliness of the world. Sometimes one finds themselves empty, spent, exhausted, anxious, unsure of how to live and what to do. Sometimes we find ourselves in a slump. And when you are in a slump, you are not in for much fun for unslumping oneself is not easily done.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the wilderness. We stagger to a cliff of a great divide. The prophet Ezekiel describes these moments as a chasm of dry bones. We become so empty that even our flesh blows away leaving nothing but our lifeless bones. We become bone tired unable to see the glory of the full to the brim life across the chasm. Jesus is the bridge across the chasm. The Holy Spirit is the life that flows into us and regenerates our flesh, fills our hearts with joyful love and inspires us to dance, leap, and soar. God the creator made everyone and everything so love will resurrect all.

The psalmist describes our emptiness: **Psalm 31:9-16 NRSV** “**Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many-- terror all around!-- as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.**

The prophet Isaiah declares: **Isaiah 50:4-9a NRSV** “**The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning God wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; God who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?”**

Holy Week is the account of Jesus taking on our emptiness and carrying us across the bridge to glorious full life. It is an account of both the journey through the portal of earthly death to glorious eternal resurrection life and the journey from empty seasons in your earthly life to full seasons.

It matters not how one is empty. It matters not if one is even aware they are empty. Holy Week proclaims all of us will be transformed from emptiness to fullness.

Overflowing with compassion for three years, Jesus healed, guided, and taught, transforming people from emptiness to fullness. Holy week is the account of Jesus taking on the emptiness of the world so everyone can enjoy fullness.

The Apostle Paul writes: **Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV** “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though Jesus was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Biblical professor Peter Gomes said: “God’s love is the only thing that makes sense out of suffering, conflict, or tragedy. God’s love does not do away with conflict, or suffering, or tragedy. God’s love is the thing that makes it possible to bear it, to see it, to share in it, to understand it, and to pass through it.”

Jesus took on the emptiness of the world to prove that God’s love is more than sufficient to get us through everything to full living. The journey can be arduous. Jesus knew he would make it through the emptiness to fullness and Jesus prayed for another way, an easier way, a less painful way, to get us to fullness. Jesus felt your emptiness so acutely that Jesus sweated blood as he prayed for you in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus full of grace endured the emptiness, the cross, death, to get us all home to the fullness God desires for all of us for eternity.

Luke 19:28-40 NLT “Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As Jesus came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. “Go into that village over there,” Jesus told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?” And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. As Jesus rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When Jesus reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!” Jesus replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would shout out!”

The truth will be proclaimed. If people cannot voice the truth, then the stones will shout out. God has created every aspect of creation with truth-telling ability.

Trees speak truth to me. Trees stand against wind, rain, snow, and sleet. Some trees even stand through fire, drought, and flood. Trees grow, reaching their hands in praise of God. Trees feast upon the light, so they can grow strong and be a gracious host providing home for a variety of creatures. Trees enable me to breath deep as they convert carbon dioxide to oxygen. Trees embrace the rhythm of grace, resting in the winter, reviving in the spring, flourishing in the summer, and giving color for all to enjoy in the fall. The trees of the field clap their leaf hands and lead all forth with joy. In time each tree is transformed via root or seed into another tree, via structural homes, via nourishment for life. All of creation has empty moments. God takes every emptiness and pours in love until fullness abounds.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the multitude of disciples begins to joyfully shout hosanna. The Pharisees try to silence them, but Jesus responds: “I tell you, even if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” All of creation cries out with praise—that message rises above the noise, even if the oppressive powers want to silence it. As we begin our walk through Holy Week, let us ask: What cannot be silenced? What must be said? What things can we not stay quiet about? What is bubbling up that we need to give voice to—faith questions, apologies, issues of justice, truth-telling? As we go deeper into the story, the truth will soon be set free.

In Tarana Burke’s podcast *Unbound* she says: “There is something liberating about getting truth out of your body, getting truth out of your system and confessing,” to God and to yourself. Truth is liberating. As one discovers how to journey from emptiness to fullness, they often become a truth teller, a guide for others and a justice advocate for our society.

Perhaps transformation will come to you by pouring out the truth about yourself, naming your incompleteness, your tears, your struggles, your hurts, your longings, your brokenness, your emptiness. Jesus, fullness personified, is with you. The Greek word used for “shout out” means to cry out loudly with an urgent scream using inarticulate shouts that express deep emotion. The sound is intense like a raven's piercing cry. The people were screaming hosanna, a prayer for help, Jesus save us, fill our emptiness with the fullness of God you embody. The people know the emptiness of failing health and have seen Jesus’ fullness heal. The people know the emptiness of broken

relationships and have seen Jesus' fullness unite. The people know the emptiness of anxiety, fear, and hate and have seen Jesus' fullness provide peace, hope, and love. The people know the emptiness of loss and death and have seen Jesus' fullness restore and resurrect. The people know the emptiness of sin and have seen Jesus' fullness forgive. The people know the emptiness of being cast out and have seen Jesus' fullness bringing everyone home. How are you empty? Take time this week to scream Hosanna, to let your truth out, to name your authentic self, to express your deepest emotions, to God, the Fullness, who is eager to quench your emptiness making you full forever.

The people were screaming hosanna, a prayer for help, Jesus save us, fill our emptiness with the fullness of God you embody. Take time this week to scream Hosanna, to let the truth out for the world, to voice compassion for the oppressed, to yell "stop" to the oppressors, to demand food, clothes, housing, education, health care, freedom for all, to name the world's emptiness, to proclaim God's fullness, to dream and serve to get us all to the promise land flowing with milk, honey, and every blessing.

Pastor Ashley DeTar Birt writes: "Expressing our joys, telling our truths, asking the questions we need to ask, repenting and making amends, being our honest and authentic selves—these things are too important to be silent." What truths, questions, confessions, and expressions are bubbling up to the surface—in our community and in the world? What forces, systems, people, are trying to silence the truth of God's love? As we journey through Holy Week, what truths must be said aloud?

The people were screaming hosanna, a prayer of worship, adoration, praise, joy, honor, glory to God who is complete, full, abundant, gracious, pouring fullness upon all of creation. Take time this week to scream, hosanna, to worship God, to be grateful for the fullness you have received, to praise God for the fullness that is coming, to wonder in the majesty of our Gracious God who can forever pour out fullness and have ever more fullness to give.

Even the Stones Will Cry Out
a poem by Sarah Speed

The Pharisees found Jesus;
they said, "Order your disciples to stop."
It's not the first time justice was almost silenced.
People stood on the sidelines shouting hosanna which means, "Save us,"
"Save me."
It's not the first time we've heard that cry from the street.
The Pharisees said stop.
They wanted the people quiet, but some things can't be silenced.
Justice will bubble up,
hope will raise its head,
love will rise to the surface.
Hate and fear will try to drown them out,
but you cannot silence what was here first,
which was love,
and it was good.
It was so good.
So even the stones will cry out.
Remember that at your parade.
Justice will bubble up,
hope will raise its head,
love will rise to the surface.

However, you are empty. You will be full. Amen.