

Complicit...I don't often think about that term very often. I certainly don't think about it applying to me. I think about it applying to people who hang out with those who commit crimes. My understanding of our legal system is that one can be convicted of being complicit when one knows something and does not come forward. Certainly, that doesn't apply to me, to us? Or does it? Are you familiar with the confession we sometimes recite prior to receiving communion?

"God forgive me for the things I have done and to the things I have left undone." That's complicit. For the most part, I am aware of various things I have done in my life, and ask God's forgiveness for those things. But the things I have left undone requires a whole lot more self-reflection and soul searching. And I imagine, if I were truthful with myself, I am probably more guilty of the things I have left undone. These include the opinions and beliefs I have kept to myself in order to keep the peace. I don't want to upset the fragile balance. Generally, it's not much fun to bear the blame of people's discontent, or their wrath. So, I don't always speak out. Ever find yourself in a similar situation? In our culture of Seattle – we have affectionately become called what people refer to as "Seattle Nice". We stay on the polite side, without really saying what we think, or standing up for or standing in the gap for those who need our voice. Do we give voice to what is important to us, and what we truly see will bring about the kingdom of God? More often we tend to hide behind a cloak of civility, of keeping the status quo, or...

What does this have to do with Palm Sunday and Holy Week??? If you were hearing this story 2000 years ago, and you lived somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean ancient world, it might feel like the entrance of a military conqueror, escorted by his troops. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is not only Jesus going to a place of danger but it involves Jesus engaging in dangerous activity. The actions of the crowd following Jesus into the city to celebrate Passover, amidst shouts of affirmation, waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna (in gospels Mt, Mk, & Jn), point to their expectation that Jesus would use his power to liberate them from the foreign oppression of Rome. It would be seen as an act of defiance against Roman rule. Rome had killed more than its fair share of those who presented a threat to Roman rule.

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem for the Passover on a donkey, there were two very different processions into Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan have collaborated on a book entitled *The Last Week*. They begin their account with a description of this procession by Jesus into one end of Jerusalem at the same time that the Roman Empire's representative, Pontius Pilate, enters at the other end. Pilate has arrived to "keep the peace" in the city during the turbulent time of Passover, when the crowds always get a little unruly. He rides in on a magnificent warhorse, with troops and flags and weapons, an intimidating display of power. All the signs of empire. On the other hand, Jesus - full of a different kind of power - makes his entrance riding a humble donkey, not a warrior's horse, surrounded by his somewhat ragged group of followers. This shows that God's plan of deliverance would not come by violence but would come through humility, compassion and love. It is hope, humility and love operating in an environment of danger that shows us what God can accomplish and how. Meanwhile this multitude of disciples is crying out: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" The throng of disciples cannot contain themselves. We think of King David stripped to his loincloth, dancing before the ark of the covenant as it was brought into Jerusalem.

But the Pharisees - like religious leaders in all times, they are *worried*. No doubt when pilgrims came

to Jerusalem for this annual festival, nationalistic feelings and longing for liberation ran high. Roman authorities were particularly on the lookout for possible agitation against Roman power as Jewish pilgrims flocked into Jerusalem. The Pharisees seem to have better instincts than most folks about these things, and they can smell trouble brewing. They know about Pilate coming in the other gate of the city – and they're not stupid about what can happen if Rome feels threatened even by a ragtag group of religious enthusiasts. Rome steps on people, brutally, and puts them in their place. So the Pharisees fret – "Teacher," they say, "tell your followers to hush. They're going to bring down the heel of Rome on all our throats. *Don't be causing trouble now.*"

Jesus answers "Even the stones will cry out!" He reminds them – and us – that, despite any of our calculations and precautions, *all* creation longs to participate in the drama of salvation. Even if you could get the disciples to quiet down, he says, the stones would shout out the good news. Here is faith in a sure triumph of God. It may be temporarily silenced, but not for long.

This is a manic Sunday in the Christian year. If you close your eyes and imagine the dynamic - the joyous followers, the worried local politicians and officials, the priests threatened by Jesus' teaching and by the pressure of distant powers in Rome - you can hear the mixed murmuring that might have occurred. When the powers of the world step in later in the week, the crowd who hailed Jesus as King were nowhere to be found. I can't imagine they were the same voices to cry Crucify, but I can imagine they became silent. They were not necessarily like Judas who would betray; perhaps more like Peter who would deny. If I were to find myself in this crowd, I could easily accuse myself of being complicit, of not speaking out. Where do you find yourself?

In Germany, Martin Niemöller was a decorated u-boat captain in World War I, but subsequently became a minister of religion and a relatively high profile opponent of the Nazis as they increasingly gained firm hold of the reins to power in Germany. Niemöller was active as a leader in a so-called Pastors' Emergency League and in a Synod that denounced the abuses of the dictatorship in the famous "*Six Articles of Barmen.*" Such activities finally led to his arrest on July 1, 1937. After appearing in court, he was released. Hitler personally ordered his incarceration. Niemöller remained in a concentration camp, with long periods of solitary confinement, until the end of the war. Niemöller himself lived through the events associated with the Nazi seizure of absolute power and knew which groups had been persecuted by the Nazis and also knew the order in which those groups had come particularly under persecution. He traveled internationally after the war and delivered many speeches and sermons in which he confessed of his own blindness and inaction in earlier years when the Nazi regime rounded up the communists, socialists, trade unionists, and, finally, the Jews. In this regard he framed a now famous quotation:

*First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out-- because I was not a communist;  
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out-- because I was not a socialist;  
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out-- because I was not a trade unionist;  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out-- because I was not a Jew;  
Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak out for me.*

South Africa – Churches complicit in Apartheid. They were complicit by not speaking out because they were comfortable. Peter Story

Joan Chittester - "*The miracle of the Red Sea,*" the rabbis taught, "*is not the parting of the waters. The miracle of the Red Sea is that with a wall of water on each side of him, the first Jew walked through.*" The implications are clear: God is not in this alone. God may be all-powerful and unailing,

but that's not the whole point. The real determinant between what ought to be and what will be in this world is our own persistent faith that the God who leads us to a point of holy wakefulness stays with us through it to the end. The key to what happens on earth does not lie solely in God's will. All God can do is part the waters. It lies in the courage we bring to the parting of them.

It lies in deciding whether or not we will walk through the parting waters of our own lives today. Just as surely as there was need for courage at the Red Sea, just as surely as there was need for courage on Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem, there is need for it in our lives as well.

The Waters part all around us. We each have a personal road to Jerusalem. We are surrounded by situations that need our courage and creativity and voices to resolve them: Even the stones will cry out. Will you be one of the stones???

Membership vows – *Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*

The church is sometimes called upon to engage in dangerous activity, whether it is speaking out on issues of injustice or providing theological clarity about the church's purpose in a culture that craves entertainment and glossing over the issues. We decry violence and practice it. We talk about equality and deny it. We practice religion and forget the true gospel.

The old cannot afford prescriptions. The young have no food. The middle-age work two jobs and no matter their efforts, will not be as well off as their parents before them. The globe turns warmer and more vulnerable by the day. Species disappear. The mighty buy more guns. The powerful pay fewer taxes. The national infrastructure slips into disrepair. Fundamentalist groups and governments everywhere seek to suppress opposition, to deny questions.

We should never be surprised that the wicked are on watch and seeking to kill the righteous. Such killing may be physical, but it may be the killing of one's reputation, or trying to kill one's vision and dreams and passion.

The story of Palm Sunday is a rebuke of national policy that seeks power and domination. Palm Sunday is a day of reflection on how the presence of those who follow Christ can transform dangerous places into places of hope. Palm Sunday is God's reminder to us of what can be done when courage, humility, love and hope coalesce and enter places of danger. Pride, arrogance, self-centered ambition and self-seeking are brought out into the open and judged.

We are all on the road to Jerusalem in some way. This is the same Jerusalem over which Jesus wept. This is the great society that has forgotten the widow and the orphan, that enthrones the Pharisee and stones the prophets. Will you be the stone that cries out.