

A week ago Saturday, there was a procession up in Sackets Harbor with two-thirds of the population taking to the streets to beg for liberation. Only they weren't begging for their liberation. A mother and three children were arrested, shipped to Texas, and held by ICE for eleven days without a warrant, without a crime, and without a conviction. A mother and three children. Not gang members. Not violent criminals. A mother and her kids. (Back when Jesus said, "suffer the little children," I don't think he meant *make them suffer*.) Anyway, as a result of that procession, I'm thrilled to report that that family's been released.¹ I'm not trying to say that that mother or her kids are Jesus, but Jesus did say, "whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." So yeah, that release, that's liberation. And that's actually why Palm Sunday means so much to folks like me. Palm Sunday leads directly to our liberation. In our liberation, we find hope. And in our hope, we find the strength to stand up and process in our day. And when we process, we share that liberation again.

I know, some folks are getting tired of hearing me talk about what's happening in our world. I know some of you are angry. I want you to know that I'm not trying to hurt you or insult you or drive you away. What I want is for you to see how the truths in the Bible relate to our lives right now. What I want is for you to see how some of the worst people this planet has to offer have convinced so many that evil is actually good. What I want is for you to listen to the text and see history repeating right in front of us. But sometimes over-familiarity with this story gets in the way of understanding what's happening, so I'm gonna highlight some aspects of it.

Jesus was arrested on nonexistent charges. He was held and beaten prior to his trial. Then when he finally did get a trial, a kangaroo court determined it would be easier to execute him than to let him live. The charges that eventually land on him are lies. They say he told the people not to pay taxes, but he definitely told them to render unto Caesar what was Caesar's. As if tax evasion wasn't enough, they also said his presence and his message were "perverting our nation" (that's straight from the text, by the way. I didn't modernize that one.) His captors mock his identity, and all he can say back is 'even if I tell you the truth, you will not believe.' Pilate can't find any guilt in Jesus, so he offers to send him on his way with a quick beating, but the crowds beg for the release of a man who led an insurrection instead (that's also straight from the text). The crowd may be loud, they may be the majority, they may have political sway, but that doesn't mean they're right. Jesus gets thrown in with convicted criminals. He's executed between them, even. It's as though they decided that, since they had three crosses, they needed three bodies and grabbed Jesus to complete the set. They tortured him along the way to his execution, lifted him high to suffer, and made him guilty by association to any onlooker. The mockery, the suffering, the wrongful punishment weren't incidental. They were baked into the system. He wasn't just executed, he was executed as a warning. And when Jesus died, the land went dark. We won't get the rest of the story until next Sunday, so here we sit with the courage of Joseph of Arimathea as he asks for what's left. Most of Jesus' followers watched from a distance, too afraid or wary or stunned to act. Maybe the empire was just too big or the moment wasn't right, but his followers didn't step in to stop it. Maybe they couldn't. At least Joseph sought to reclaim dignity for the dead, a dignity stripped away one piece of clothing, one snap of the whip, one systematic mockery at a time.

Of the 200+ Venezuelans taken to El Salvador, 9 bear the name of Jesus, Jesús.² I'm not saying all nine are without fault, but news outlets like CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, Vanity Fair, Fox, and even Breitbart

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/07/nyregion/ice-family-detained-new-york.html>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/venezuelans-deported-el-salvador-names/>

acknowledge that not all of those taken are guilty.³⁴⁵⁶⁷⁸ As it turns out, as many as 75% of them have no criminal record at all. That's 179 men arrested and held behind the lie that they belong to a gang. They're falsely accused of not paying taxes.⁹ They're blamed for perverting our nation. They're mocked for their identity, and when they tell the truth about themselves, they're not believed. Even when no guilt can be found, they're still held in captivity. Some call for their release, but those in authority indulge crowds of voters delighting in their detention while also releasing insurrectionists to appease the very same crowds. As I said before, the crowd may be loud, they may be the majority, they may have political sway, but that doesn't mean they're right. All these people, guilty and innocent alike, get thrown in alongside actual criminals, and the twisted logic continues: the prison's there, so we might as well fill it. It's come to light that one of the innocent men not only has no criminal record in any country, he was actually acquitted of all charges by an American court in America six years ago.¹⁰ But those in power say he must be a bad guy because he's got some traffic violations, and so, they say, he deserves his stay in the hell of that Salvadoran prison. For him and many others, the mockery, the suffering, the wrongful punishment aren't incidental. They're baked into the system. These people aren't just imprisoned, they're imprisoned as a warning.

Y'all, America was supposed to be a beacon on a hill, but our light has gone out. Supporters of these policies said they wanted to make America great, said they wanted to protect our way of life, wanted to protect Christianity itself. Regardless of what they wanted, what they've done is make America, make our way of life, make Christianity dark. That darkness stretches over the whole land, and it's seeping out. Countries all over the world, allies our family members fought alongside against fascism, our allies are telling their people not to come here because it's too dangerous. Even the sacredness of our temples and churches is tainted. The holiest of holies lies open and bare while government agents just earned legal permission to defile the sacredness of our sacred spaces.¹¹ Rather than protecting Christianity, they dismiss the teachings of Jesus as socialist and mock the Christ-like quality of empathy as weakness.¹²

I guess what I'm getting at is that as we enter Holy Week, please look at how disturbed you are by what happens to Jesus and his followers. We all said "crucify him" together, and if you're anything like me, you felt a pang when you said it. And if you can feel that in this story, then ask yourself why you don't feel the same pang when headlines mirroring his arrest, torture, imprisonment, and death reveal the evils in our own house. As we leave the "Crucify him" of Jesus behind, ask yourself why the "deport him" of Jesús feels any different. That's for you to wrestle with in your own soul. But remember, Jesus is our constant. Crowds may be loud, they may be the majority, they may have political sway, but that doesn't mean they're right. Maybe there's a collective discipline for the final days before Easter needs doing. From our Baptismal Covenant: seek and serve Christ in all persons, but leave the hammer and nails and ICE hotlines at home.

³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-records-show-about-migrants-sent-to-salvadoran-prison-60-minutes-transcript/>

⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/ice-trump-deportations-numbers-rcna188937>

⁵ <https://abcnews.go.com/US/noncitizens-deported-alien-enemies-act-criminal-records-ice/story?id=119912375>

⁶ <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/60-minutes-venezuelans-el-salvador-prison?srsId=AfmBOop7gvhVaP6vdsdmMORUJckqsYIXEQxASTgfnAoYAJcuomVTd8fwy>

⁷ <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/venezuelans-deported-trump-alien-enemies-act>

⁸ <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2025/04/10/supreme-court-rules-trump-admin-facilitate-release-deported-man-el-salvador-prison/>

⁹ https://www.cato.org/blog/fiscal-impact-immigration-united-states?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw5PK_BhBBEiwAL7GTPVISwXkRcMBzhQ_WZqWYr-cHkBuoi-b9hxnNyY_nWPa0bj9yheYArRoCFtIQAvD_BwE

¹⁰ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/deported-maryland-father-vance/>

¹¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-admin-win-judge-ice-enforcement-churches-places-worship>

¹² <https://www.happyscribe.com/public/the-joe-rogan-experience/2281-elon-musk>