

Palm Sunday, Year A,

Hosanna

Sermon by Rev. Glenn A. Brumbaugh

5th April, 2020

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 NSRV / Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV

Here we are, Palm Sunday.

That day when we traditionally shake off the gloom

of the penance and self-reflection of Lent

and sing triumphant hymns while waving palms,

to shouts of “Hosanna in the highest!”

We commemorate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem,

sharing in the promise of the arrival of the long-awaited messiah,

with those Israelites millennia ago.

We look forward to gathering with friends and family, Easter Egg hunts,

and fellowship and worship with our church family.

Yet one cannot escape the ironies and contradictions of this day.

Many in the crowds of Jesus day yearned for the Son of David of prophesy

to relieve them of the misery of oppression

from their Roman oppressors and their puppet state enforcers.

They were in a desperate state.

Many were barely able to survive under crippling taxes and rents.

There was little sense of self-determination.

They felt stuck between a rock and a hard place,

with little to no control of their situation.

Yet in Jesus they see redemption in the fulfillment of prophesy.

Matthew's gospel has Jesus staging the scene like a boss.

Following the words of Isaiah, Zechariah,

and even the psalms read during the Passover festival,

Jesus comes down from the Mount of Olives and enters the city,

riding a lowly donkey with palms being waved and laid in his path.

Wanting to be painstakingly accurate in Jesus as the prophesied messiah,

the writer of Matthew actually errs on the side of a literal translation of Zechariah

to have Jesus improbably riding two donkeys of different sizes into the city,

all to the cries of joyous "Hosannas!"

Yet here is where the contradictions begin.

Matthew's author and the crowds laud the triumphant arrival

of their humble, peaceful ruler, yet peaceful humility is not their expectation.

They long more for what is marching through a gate on the opposite side of the city.

A heavily armed military force, led by a commanding figure on a war horse.

They yearn for a might warrior to destroy their oppressors and enemies,

and restore them to the might and glory of King David's time.

They cry "hosanna," which is ironic in itself.

It translates from Aramaic as "help me, or save me,"

yet over the centuries we have made it seem to be more like shouts of "hooray,"

like Jesus was in some sort of ticker tape parade.

Yet the help and salvation they sought was vengeance and retribution.

So quickly they forgot the words of the Haggadah,

those words of the Psalms that speak of a God of love.

So quickly did they forget the commandment to love their neighbor.

So quickly did they disregard this acclaimed prophet from Nazareth's words

to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Like their ancestors in David's day, they didn't see a world built on God's terms,

they sought worldly power and prominence as God's special ones.

And when he failed to meet their selfish expectations of worldly power and success,

the final irony is they would be the same people

who cried "crucify him" at the end of the week.

It can be easy for us in hindsight to cast judgment, but can you blame them?

They had endured centuries of domination and oppression,

of feeling alone and abandoned, even by their God.

The miserable status quo seemed to be all they could rely on;

doing their best to get by in the system they had.

Then along comes this ray of hope, this beacon of potential change.

Yet when the hope he promises doesn't immediately materialize,

when he fails to meet their expectations in the context of this world,

they return to the system that they knew, that they were familiar with.

And that system played the situation well.

Jesus was the real threat, not them.

The injustice that system promoted and sustained

was the only way to survive in this world.

If this "prophet" and the threat of upheaval he represented was not eliminated,

the consequences would be dire.

Fear is a very effective tool, isn't it?

Maybe the crowd's fickle reactions aren't so hard to understand.

Our world isn't so different.

I'm sure many of us are feeling lone and abandoned.

Many still suffer under the oppression and dominance of a few.

And I'm sure I'm not alone in the frustration and anger I often feel
at what is happening now.

The true meaning of "hosanna" has more significance for us now.

The question we need to ask ourselves, is what "help" are we seeking?

How can we be "saved?" What is our perspective, in our own situation?

I think for many of us, this new world we have found ourselves in, has been sobering.

For so long, we have relied on ourselves to define success and security.

We accumulated wealth to get all those items

that we thought would give us, and maybe our immediate families,

all those things that would enable the joy and security we yearned for.

We became insular, focused on our own little piece of the world,

and filled the emptiness with stuff and community from a distance,

on a little screen in front of us.

Many sought to find their own way into being in that little group at the top,

the group that convinced us their way was the ideal,

and taught us to fear any challenge to that viewpoint.

Yet suddenly, now we are forced to stay in our own little piece of that world,

and we realize what we have lost.

Now that little screen is all we have, and all that stuff we acquired,

and the potential prominence of being part of the powerful,

seem like rather hollow foundations.

Things like toilet paper and milk have more value than Gucci and expensive trainers.

But probably most of all, we miss each other. We miss the human interaction.

These little screens just aren't cutting it so much now.

Especially this week, Holy Week, it's particularly tough.

We miss the palms and music, but most importantly

we miss the gathering with beloved friends and family, the fellowship together.

We're realizing that it's not the distant followers on Instagram,

the remote friends on Facebook, or the stuff,

but the community that's important.

Those friends and family we love to gather with, our church family,

and the many strangers we meet and greet in the course of our daily errands.

Maybe Holy Week is the perfect time to be experiencing all of this.

After all, after the joy of Palm Sunday faded, Jesus began his walk to the cross, alone.

His dark time was beginning.

Yet through it all, his message and the salvation it offered did not change.

He didn't change his sound bites to appease the worldly needs of the crowd.

He stayed with God's ideal.

One of caring for one another, one of "us," not me and them,

of love, not retribution and hate.

His resurrection offers the promise of a world based on that love,

one that is in direct opposition to the world that condemned him as a threat.

The question for us today, is how will we bear our own crosses?

How will we emerge from our own Passion Weeks?

We have a choice.

We can continue to keep rebuilding the same world

that keeps leading to failure and desperation,

or we can try something different.

We can choose to learn from this experience,

to embrace the blessing of this time of reflection,
or we can just rebuild the same old status quo.

Will we let these times of loneliness and isolation just become faded memory,

or will we seek to change our ways of being:

to value community and togetherness,

and keep these little screens and our other stuff in their proper perspective?

Will we seek to reach out to others, so that they are no longer “them” but “us?”

And as disciples of Christ, as Christ's body, will we work to change our country and our world

to be the great community of love and compassion we are called to?

These may seem like hopeless idealistic goals,

but we worship a God who works almost entirely outside of our box.

God's plan for us has been clear all along.

The question is, will we follow it and choose the cornerstone to build with

that does not fit in the logic of this world?

As we journey into the rest of this holiest of weeks,

as we remember the trials of sufferings of our savior so long ago

and the redemption it provides,

I hope and pray that we emerge from this time a changed people,

with a renewed understanding of what really matters,

and a renewed commitment to be the true community God calls us to be,

in response to our cries of Hosanna. Amen.

Call to Serve

Lord Jesus, you who expressed your kingship not by taking but by giving, not by demanding but by sacrificing – bless us now as we follow your example in the

giving of ourselves in these signs of our lives – our tithes and offerings, our service and prayers, given in your honor and for the good of the world.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *Dona Nobis Pacem*

Giulio Caccini, arranged by James A. Moore, Conducted by Timm Adams Barber
– Performed by the Chicago Chamber Choir & Milwaukee Choral Artists

As we take time to reflect, this morning we will have something special to watch as we reflect. This piece, title “Dona Nobis Pacem,” which means “grant us peace.” As we listen to this beautiful rendition, let's give thought to how we, as the body of Christ, can respond to the cries of “hosanna, help us” around us today, and share with the world the peace that can only be found in Christ.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Eternal God, you have created the heavens and the earth, giving breath to every living thing. We thank you for the gifts of creation and for life itself. We thank you for making us in your own image, for forgiving us when we act as though you have no claim on us, and for keeping us in your constant care.

We rejoice in Jesus Christ, the only one eternally begotten by you, born of your servant Mary, who shared the joys and sorrows of our lives. We remember his death and celebrate his resurrection, and in the beloved community of your church, we seek his kin-dom's arrival in this world.

We take courage from the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit in our midst. We offer you our praise for women and men of faith in every age who stand as witnesses to your love and justice.

