

“Humility, Self-Examination, Confession & Loving Action”

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Mark 11:1-11, Philippians 2:5-8 & 9-11
& Mark 1:15 & 27:25

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious Savior, you have the words of eternal life. As your living scripture is read and proclaimed, empower us to hear it with openness, so we are transformed, renewed, and resurrected. Amen

One's wonder, gratitude, and excitement of Easter is often enhanced when one enters the story and journeys through this tumultuous week, the passion of Jesus, the life, betrayal, grief, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. Together we will explore several scriptures today. I hope you will also join us for virtual Maundy Thursday worship for additional scriptures and the Tenebrae. The service will be available on our YouTube and Facebook pages for worship anytime starting on Maundy Thursday.

The Old Testament scriptures foretell of this holy week. Jesus entered human flesh, so his story is also our story. Ponder how Jesus' experience resonates with your life with every step. Hopefully, none of us will be physically beaten and crucified and yet we all can relate to be rejected, beaten by words, and having a dream crucified. You have a connection to each part of the story. As the scriptures are read imagine Jesus' journey and ponder the connection to your journey.

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 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.”

Jesus loves you so much that he set his face like flint to save you through the cross. Jesus endured beatings, betrayals, insults, and death to resurrect you. How do you set your face like flint to love others? How do you sacrifice for others? How do you teach others about love for you are a teacher of God's free unconditional love? Loving others may be arduous, difficult, and costly. God will help you. God is filling you with love and the gift of speech to sustain the weary with your loving compassion. Your loving words make reality when coupled with your loving actions.

The psalmist pours out their soul to God. Jesus' pain, grief, and suffering was so acute that he sweated blood as he prayed. Give God your burdens. Pour out your soul to God for God will shine upon you and save you in God's steadfast love. **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.

God answers every prayer. God's steadfast eternal love will resurrect all and be savored forever. We are able to rejoice every day, even during turmoil because every instant of love, joy, and goodness will be savored by everyone forever. **Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29** “Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good! God's faithful love endures forever. Let all Israel repeat: “God's faithful love endures forever.” Open for me the gates where

the righteous enter, and I will go in and thank the Lord. These gates lead to the presence of the Lord, and the godly enter there. I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory! The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see. This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Please, Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success. Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, shining upon us. Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you! You are my God, and I will exalt you! Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good! God's faithful love endures forever."

Jerusalem was electric with anticipation. Jesus who loves everyone is approaching. Jesus who has been healing, nourishing, helping, setting free, teaching everyone is coming. The crowd shouted hosanna which is a twofold prayer. "God save us" and "God we joyfully adore and praise you." **Mark 11:1-11 NRSV** **"When Jesus and the disciples were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"** They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and Jesus sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."

Biblical scholar, Charles Campbell said, "Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is "one of the most politically explosive acts of Jesus' ministry." Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem, the center of power in first-century Palestine, during Passover, the celebration of liberation from the unjust and cruel domination that had enslaved them in Egypt. Jesus knew the Roman governor would be arriving via parade on an adorned stallion for the sole purpose of controlling the crowds with power. Jesus carefully orchestrated his entrance to make a parody out of, the military processions by which Roman kings and governors processed. Jesus was redefining power from controlling people to lovingly serve everyone. Rather than riding on a powerful horse, Jesus rode into the city on a donkey. Instead of displaying military might, Jesus rode in without weapons. Jesus planned a political demonstration as different as it could possibly be from that of the Roman governor Pilate. Jesus embodied the Kingdom of God with grace, joy, and glory for everyone. Jesus humbly served. Jesus freely gave to everyone.

Any kind of demonstration begs the question, "What is the point?" Why did Jesus stage a political, Palm Sunday demonstration? By mocking the political powers Jesus revealed that power should not be used to control others. Money, military might, palaces are fleeting. Love, joy, compassion, service are eternal. Jesus was not seeking power. Jesus was giving power away, making humanity equal, adopting us into God's family and saving us. Jesus carefully laid plans for an anti-triumphant demonstration reveals his desire to resurrect the political dimension. We are called to make all dimensions, even the political dimension, a way of lovingly blessing all people. Jesus began Christianity and a social movement and a political movement.

On this politically charged Palm Sunday what actions is God calling you to implement? The Apostle Paul proclaimed a hymn sung by the early church. **Philippians 2:9-11 NRSV** **"Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus and gave Jesus 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 political vision conveyed in this hymn is one of the kingdoms of God in which Jesus Christ is Lord over all. Every tongue will confess, and every knee will bend when everyone is cared for and loved. Until society is such that even those who are in the lowest positions are valued and exalted, there will be no kingdom of God on earth. We are called to care for and love everyone. We are called to confront, denounce, and eradicate racism and all isms that control and oppress anyone.

The Apostle Paul wrote, **Philippians 2:5-8 NRSV** **"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he 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 servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” In Christ, God is humbled so that humanity can be exalted.” God is calling us to challenging action, to willingly humble ourselves, to graciously give up some of our status and self-interest, our power and privilege, for the sake of others, to empower others, to support the good desires of the least among us.

Episcopal priest, attorney, politician, and senator John Danforth said, “It is the responsibility of everyone to reform politics so that decent people—even sensitive people—will want to seek, not be driven away from, public office.” John continues, “I believe deep in my heart, that it is now our duty, yours and mine, to turn politics into something much better than its now-so-miserable state.”

To turn politics into compassion, care, support, and love for all will require people who are willing to give up some of their own position and power so that others can gain higher ground. This is a hard kind of discipleship that we must undertake if we genuinely want to work for the kingdom of God in which every tongue will confess and every knee will bend in praise of God. It requires us to humble ourselves, to serve, to love.

Palm Sunday marks a stunning transition. Before Palm Sunday, people were constantly coming to Jesus asking questions. Jesus lovingly answered the questions. His teachings astounded. His words healed, united, nourished and transformed. From Palm Sunday through the crucifixion, Jesus’ voice fades into the background until Jesus hardly says a word. The cacophony of other voices is unsettling, disturbing, and confusing. False claims, malicious rumors, inciting accusations, relentless interrogation, threats of riot, soldiers mocking, and crowds shouting, at first “Hosanna!” and by the end of the week “Crucify him!” All these voices, alongside the painful behind-the-scenes betrayal by Judas and the multiple denials of Peter, overtake the words of Jesus. During the chaos then, as in the messiness of life today, we, as a worldwide community, God’s family, are urged to undertake soul-searching? What did we do? What did I fail to do? What could I have done differently? How do we shun the Kingdom of God? How do we betray grace? How do we crucify love in human flesh, Jesus?

The gospel of Matthew introduces us to the haunting issue of taking responsibility for the blood of the innocent. Multiple parties were concerned not to have blood on their hands. Pilate declares his innocence in Jesus’ death by publicly washing his hands. Judas tried to shake responsibility for his part in the plot by returning the silver paid him for betraying Jesus, and the religious authorities who paid him in the first place do not want to keep the blood money, so they purchase a field with it. While all the parties involved are guilty, Matthew makes a point of showing that responsibility most clearly falls on the people—the crowd who shout, **Matthew 27:25 “Jesus’ blood be on us and on our children!”**

Pastor Joyce Shin preached, “By the time Matthew was writing, a generation after Christ’s crucifixion, Jerusalem itself had already fallen and the temple had already been destroyed. The people to whom Matthew was likely writing were themselves going through a period of self-examination. At the hands of Roman authorities, they had suffered badly, and in their suffering, they turned to examine themselves. After all, for a people inspired with an understanding that their history was guided by a just God, it would have been insufficient for them to explain all their suffering in terms of only tactical and political mistakes. They had to go further and deeper to ask what part they themselves played. It was in this climate of self-examination that Matthew wrote his Gospel. How sobering it must have been for Matthew and his audience to be able to recognize themselves in the crowd of people who, at the beginning of the week, yelled out “Hosanna to the Son of David” and then, by the end of the week, cried out, “Let him be crucified!” We can understand this, because even though we too were not there, we are aware of how easy it is to go along with a crowd and how hard it is to stop a malicious crowd.”

So, what does it mean when the crowd voluntarily shouts out: “His blood be on us and on our children!” The crowd was unknowingly confessing their part in creating a fearful and hateful world. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” We are responsible for the mess of the world, for fear, hate, poverty, hunger, discrimination, oppression, and every form of darkness.

Confession is a turning point to resurrection. Confession involves reconciliation, forgiveness, putting hurts in the past and living into the new beginning. Jesus said, **Mark 1:15 “repent and believe the good**

news.” If we are going to get to Easter resurrection on earth soon, we need to confess, to change, to humbling serve, to actively love.

Our world is so messy and the voices of fear and hate so loud and numerous when you speak with love, when you serve with grace, your voice and actions will seem silent and faint, like Jesus during holy week. The Holy Spirit is within us eager to usher the Kingdom of God to earth, to inspire an Easter resurrection for all.

Today on Palm Sunday, we stand at a threshold. The gracious, forgiving, healing, uniting, joyful ministry of Jesus was for a week drowned out by fake news, competing claims, false charges, cowardly denials, relentless interrogations, and the fickle cries of the crowds. During the chaos, cruelty, and crucifixion it is hard to imagine the possibility of a new beginning. And yet, that is what we know always happens. Easter follows Good Friday. Resurrection follows crucifixion.

We are living in a time of marches, protests, trails and parades, a time of chaos and numerous voices. If we want to speed the fulfillment of Easter in our near future on earth, we have loving work to do. To get past replicas of the past, more of the same, you and I—all of us—must engage in the hard work of self-examination, confession, and loving action.

Jesus’ inclusive love, radically equal justice, and freedom for all was on trial. Jesus convicted, forgave, and sought to resurrect all who use power to get their way, violence to control, speech to produce fear, division and hate and hoard resources at the expense of others. Jesus makes us aware of our flawed, hurtful, meaningless, fleeting, destructive, life diminishing, dark sinful ways so we can confess, be forgiven and be resurrected to perfect, healing, purposeful, eternal, harmonious, life enhance, shining ways. Easter proclaims that love always ultimately wins. God is calling you and I, all of us to make Easter happen on earth. God is calling us to active extravagant love in all dimensions. Easter proclaims that love always ultimately wins. Amen