

“Join the Good News Movement”

Mark 11:1-11, Psalm 118:1, 19-29, Acts 4:11

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Prayer for Understanding Holy One, give us the wisdom to hear your word, take your word into our hearts and act on your truth. We are listening. Amen.

The good news is inspiring us to act. The psalmist sings: **Psalm 118:1, 19-29 NRSV** “**O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever! Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God and God has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will exalt you. O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.**”

City gates in the ancient Israelite culture were the bustling, multi-functional hearts of the city, serving as the central hub for social, legal, and economic life. The city gate was a powerful symbol and a vital institution representing the community, its identity, and its well-being. To control the gate was to control the city and the activities that took place there were central to the life of every Israelite. The psalmist prays: **Open to me the gates of righteousness. This is the gate of the Lord.** This is a prayer of action seeking to align one’s life with the purposes of God. Hell is broken relationships. Hell leaves one gated away from community. Heaven is loving relationships with everyone, self, and God. Righteousness is right loving relationships. The prayer asks for God to open oneself up to loving relationships, commits to strive to nurture loving relationships, and desires to pass through the gate to heaven on earth where everyone is in loving relationship.

The psalmist prays: **The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.** In ancient times, builders inspected stones carefully. The cornerstone was critical. It set the angle for the entire building and bore enormous weight. The cornerstone was interrelated to the integrity of the entire structure. Sin breaks relationships. Humanity is the builders who are rejecting loving relationships. Jewish tradition reads this verse as an illustration of the covenant. They are the cornerstone, blessed by God to bless all people. Called by God to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, to love all people and self with all our heart, soul, and mind. Called to be a cornerstone lovingly related to all.

In the New Testament, the good news views Jesus as the cornerstone. Peter preached: **Acts 4:11** “**Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; Jesus has become the cornerstone**” Jesus, rejected, crucified, cast aside by the powers of his day, but raised from the dead to become the cornerstone of God’s new creation. This verse also proclaims hope to all who have ever been overlooked or dismissed. God has a way of taking people who others discard and making them central to God’s plan. All who are rejected will be included in the house of God. Jesus is our cornerstone, the firm foundation who models, teaches, and enables us to love all.

The psalmist praise God for the these coming loving relationships praying. **This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.** The great reversal of the outcast being welcomed into loving relationship is not a random oddity, not accidentally serendipitous and certainly not the result of clever human maneuvers. It is God’s doing. The Hebrew word for “marvelous” proclaims astonishing, miraculous, something you are in awe of because everyone in loving relationship seems too good to be true. This verse calls to mind the resurrection, the ultimate reversal, the definitive surprise, the moment when God’s power rewrote the future. So, when reconciliation happens where only division seemed possible, when light shines in darkness, when life comes out of death, we echo. **This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.**

God is at work redeeming all. God is loving bringing everyone into loving relationship. God is forgiving, healing, transforming making all glorious. It is movement from Lent to Easter, from despair to

celebration, from violence to peace, from suffering to completeness, from death to eternal abundant life. This movement is happening in every moment, therefore. **This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

The people shouted excerpts from Psalm 119 as Jesus entered Jerusalem. **Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.** The people followed the actions of the psalm. **Bind the festal procession with branches.** All of it was a way to proclaim: **“God’s steadfast love endures forever.”**

The good news of Mark proclaims: **Mark 11:1-11 NLT “As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. “Go into that village over there,” Jesus told them. “As soon 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, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’” The two disciples left and found the colt standing in the street, tied outside the front door. As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and Jesus sat on it. Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of Jesus, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “Praise God! Hosanna! Save now! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!” So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After looking around carefully at everything, Jesus left because it was late in the afternoon. Then Jesus returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples.”**

There were two processions into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. One was exclusive. You had to be royalty, rich and powerful to part of the West, Roman pageantry. Pontius Pilate processed with a show of force including cavalry, infantry and imperial banners declaring Caesar is Lord. This grandiose procession served to reinforce Roman rule, intimidate and threaten anyone who might revolt.

In sharp contrast is Jesus inclusive East procession. Jesus’ march is for all people. In loving relationship in the procession was the newly married couple and everyone in that area who were surprised by Jesus turning water into wine to enhance their celebration. In loving relationship in the procession were the children caught up in the excitement and imagining wonders because Jesus blessed them. And the women caught in adultery who was forgiven by Jesus, set free to live abundantly. And those who sought to condemn that were forgiven by Jesus, who dropped their stones, dropping judgement, freeing them to love. In loving relationship in the procession was the man with the healed withered hand who was now passing palm branches to others. And the one who was deaf and mute who healed by Jesus is leading the singing. And those who were lame that Jesus restored now dancing. In loving relationship in the procession were the outcasts Jesus welcomed back into community. And the woman who had been bleeding for years now healed after she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment now twirling alongside Jesus on the donkey. And the blind man, who once saw people as trees walking and who now clearly sees Jesus. In loving relationship in the procession is the girl whom Jesus raised from her deathbed and who now brought her parents to the parade. And twelve thousand people Jesus fed on the hillside with two fish and five loaves of bread who this time brought food to share with others along the parade route. In loving relationship in the procession was the woman who was thirsty until she drank of Jesus’ living water now out of her heart rivers of living water flow meeting the needs of others. And the suffering, banished lepers Jesus healed now waving palm branches and hugging their neighbors. And those who were tormented with terrors made whole by Jesus now leading chants. And a multitude of people who were healed of all their ailments, disease and sufferings by Jesus now rejoicing. Jesus removed every division, barrier, and obstacle to invite and welcome everyone to this righteous, loving, relational procession through the gate.

Palm Sunday was a revolutionary act and continues to be movement to universal flourishing. Palm Sunday is subversive, a movement you are invited to join, an expansion of love that has not yet brought all people together in love. Palm Sunday started small, was seen, but immediately unseen, loud, and expected, but bewildering unconventional. Palm Sunday is like a mustard seed that grows into a grand tree that birds find safety in to nest. Palm Sunday invites you to join the movement from Lent to Easter, from broken relationships to universal loving relationships, from death to resurrection life. Palm Sunday is good news that is beseeching you to act with love.

And four days later the processional multitude forgot the good news. They betrayed the movement. They crucified love. And God's steadfast love endures forever. And God being pure grace and mercy forgave everyone and resurrected love, resurrected the Palm Sunday movement, resurrected the journey through the gate of righteousness to universal flourishing. You are invited to join the good news movement. And we also will at times fail. Sometimes we will take a step backwards. And ultimately everyone will enjoy the good news. God's steadfast love endures forever.

“For the Sake of Tiny Resurrections”

a poem by Sarah Speed

We took the kids to the beach, a herd of children lathered in sunscreen. We spent most of the day building sandcastles, swimming in the shallows, wiping sand off their eyelashes and noses. Things changed when a small fish washed up on shore. The children saw it first, a little body gasping to survive. They cried out, Quick! We have to save it! We grabbed our buckets. We sprinted to the waterline. We scooped up the dying fish and returned it to the waves. The kids sagged with relief as the fish jolted to life, a tiny resurrection in front of our very eyes. Full of pride, I said to them, You did something good. Today, you saved a life. A seven-year-old with sun-kissed cheeks took the bucket from my hands and said, I'd like to save some more. He spent the afternoon patrolling the waves, hoping to dole out mercy to any shore-washed fish. He carried his bucket around all day because love inspires love. Love will make you want to patrol the shoreline, sing Hosanna, witness a resurrection, save some more, one bucket of water at a time.

Hosanna is a prayer meaning save us. What do we need to be saved from today? What is the good news inspiring us to do? How will the gospel move us? How will we put Jesus' teachings into practice? What signs of goodness give you hope and a confident expectancy that all is becoming glorious?

The good news is all are invited, surprising joy, protection for the vulnerable, compassion for the hurting, expanding glorious love, humble service, sacred imagination, community restoration, inclusive welcome of everyone, forgiveness, healing, justice, mercy, resurrection, being in loving relationship with everyone, God, and self. The good news is movement to completeness, peace, celebration, joy, and universal flourishing. The good news is meant to be embodied. So lay down your coat, grab a palm branch, sing hosanna, join the celebration and dance through the gate of righteousness. God's steadfast love endures forever. Amen

