

**FIRST READING:** Matthew 26:26-30,36-38

26 And as they were eating [the Passover], Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." 30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives...36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

**SECOND READING:** Matthew 26:39-50,56

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." 40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." 48 Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him...56 Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

**THIRD READING:** Matthew 26:57-68

57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled...and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" 62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" 64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! 66 What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death." 67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"

## Choir

### **FOURTH READING:** Matthew 27:1-2,22-26

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. 2 And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor... 22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" 23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" 24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." 26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

### **FIFTH READING:** Matthew 27:27-41,45-46,50

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. 28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. 35 Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet:

...36 Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. 37 And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him... 45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"...50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### ***“Hosanna to Alleluia”***

I do love the joy of Palm Sunday; congregants, excited children, parading into Sanctuaries waving palm branches singing “*Hosanna, Hosanna*”! So much happiness, imagining the parade which Jesus was in, as he made his entrance into Jerusalem so long ago. The people lined the streets and many joined in. They waved palm branches and excitedly ran in front and beside him. They threw their cloaks down to prepare a path for him. Oh, the electricity in the air must have been simply palpable. It was certainly a chaotic event but also purely organic, exuberant, joyous.

It was the best kind of joy too, one that comes from the release of distress, the lifting of deep-seated tension...for now, the people seemed to finally understand. They got it. This was God’s Anointed, whom they’d been waiting for all these years. This, Jesus, was the Messiah, the One who would, the people thought, now save them...save them from their profound fear, what haunted their every move, the stifling oppression of Rome, the brutality of the occupying government. Through him, they were already imagining a different world for their children, a world where THE freedom which was promised by the liturgy of their ancient Passover was a reality.<sup>1</sup> Nothing was more appropriate or timely than their praise!<sup>2</sup>

Jesus, however, there atop the donkey, may have had somewhat mixed emotions. For he knew what was about to occur. Like us, he knew that the hosannas would soon turn to “crucify him”, and the celebration exemplified by the waving of palm branches would soon fade into rejection accompanied by the cracking of whips, jeers, hammer and nails. He knew the story which was going to unfold over the next days. He knew because he was helping to write it. In fact, the happy parade that very morning was something he very intentionally planned to not only bring the Israelite people’s history to mind of kings riding on colts after victory in battle, but to also provoke a response from the Jewish authorities. He knew of the other parade concurrently happening in the opposite side of the city, one that happened each year during

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<sup>1</sup>Shannon J. Kershner. “*We Were There: The Crowd*”. [www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/032915.html](http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/032915.html) (accessed 4-12-19).

<sup>2</sup>Theodore Wardlaw. “*The Stewardship of Praise*”. Day1.r/832-the\_stewardship\_of\_praise. (accessed 4-12-2019).

Passover was Pilate's parade, the Roman governor's. Pilate marched through Jerusalem for the purpose of scaring the Jewish pilgrims, letting them know they'd better not get any revolutionary ideas. Jesus knew that his parade of peace and joy would stand in stark contrast to this one and would set the jaws of the nervous Jewish officials against him.

Yes, the joy amid the threat that Sunday so long ago, was a part of the great emotional change that Jesus would undergo, that we will all undergo as we inhabit the spiritual space of both this day and the upcoming week. If we stay attuned to the happenings of Holy Week, we cannot avoid the emotions which snowball from passion to lament with the story's unfolding, the story that continues with Jesus' overturning of the Temple's tables, with the betrayal by Judas, the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the desertion and the denials by disciples and close friends, the trial and terrible torture after Jesus' sentencing, and of course, the washing of Pilate's hands, bargaining for Barabbas and the crucifixion on the lonely hill of Golgotha.

Do you recall the first time you heard the story? Maybe it's a little fuzzy because your understanding of it occurred so gradually. But still, there was certainly a time when you ventured to imagine the pain and suffering of Jesus, when you dove into the deep emotional pool that is the end of the week. There was a time when your eyes first burned, tears rolled down your cheeks, and a lump grew in your throat. There was a moment of revelation when your stomach was tight, and your instinct was to run away. Well, I'm here to tell you today that it is an important thing to let ourselves experience the story as we experienced it the first time. It is important to let our emotions move from praise to deep lament.

This is for several reasons...first, if we don't, the story can become so familiar that we grow numb to it, but second, also because we need to have a sense of what Jesus felt, we need imagine the hammer hitting the nails into the wood, the groans and the gasps of pain, in order to grasp the truth about the God we worship.

Brothers and sisters, we have a God who suffers with us. And this is unique. No other world religion has such a God, and not only that, our God suffers for us. Yes, for us out of

love! The cross, is not, you see, some sadistic symbol of an angry father exacting the cost of divine justice or of his wrathful punishment on a surrogate. No, the cross is a vivid testimony of how far Jesus was willing to go in sacrificial, vulnerable love for us, those who share his flesh, those whom he came to be in total solidarity with, those whose sins and whose sinned against states he came to take on. The cross is a vivid example of how deep Jesus was willing to descend to show us that we, in Christ, can never be outside of God's reach. There is no place that is too low or too dark or too far away, too wretched that God has not and cannot go to be with us and to share with us his mercy, grace and unending forgiveness. No place. There is no place that is outside God's embrace. We are always within God's saving reach. As the psalmist says, "*Even the darkness is not dark to you, Lord; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.(v. 12). Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.(v. 10.)*"

Yes, we need not hold back from walking the emotional trek that is part of Holy week to understand the limitless saving reach of God, but there's something even more. The cross, horrible as it is, can and should awaken in us an energy for compassion, responsible action and reaction, and give us hope in the world marked by enormous suffering and evil. Seeing Jesus on the cross, seeing his selfless, suffering love for us serves to invite us all and "lure" us to respond in loving others as he has loved. This is what is meant by the power of the cross, the power of weakness. God, the Son, the omnipotent, died on a cross, a symbol of humiliation and weakness, but yet the enormous power in the act is staggering. As Rev. Elizabeth Johnson says, "*The crucified God is in solidarity with those who suffer. This is a mystery of empowerment. With moral indignation, concern for broken creation and a sympathy calling for justice, the power of God's compassionate [and witnessed] love enters the pain of the world to transform it from within.*"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2003), 269-270.

So, siblings in Christ, as we allow ourselves to move from emotions of joy to great sadness this week, as we participate today in celebration and then begin the emotional journey to lamentation, let us remember who it is who came to suffer with us, who suffers for us and who empowers us for service. Yes, let's remember. Let's remember. But, but let's also remember that the One crucified is the Light that the Darkness could not overcome. There is hope in the horrible, yet somehow beautiful cross to which we journey this week. There is hope. There is hope because Jesus has overcome death and has opened the gates to eternal life for all who believe. Even when the smell of death temporarily overtakes the smell of spring and when songs of praise become distant in our memories, even when we have weeks like this past one when it seems there has been enough suffering, death and pain for a lifetime, we can proclaim that we know our future. Jesus has broken into history to share with us his life, his death and resurrection! Thus, we can rest in his loving arms, knowing that his grace and forgiveness is what wins.<sup>4</sup> Friends, today we hear "hosanna". This week, "crucify him". But "Alleluia" is soon to come. "Alleluia" Is Soon To Come. **"ALLELUIA" IS SOON TO COME!** To God be the glory through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Shannon Kirschner. <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2019/041419.html> (accessed 3-31-23).