



# *Palm Sunday*

## *Sermon by Revd Sharmain James*



Sunday 10 April 2022

### READINGS

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14—23:56

## *Joy and pain of Palm Sunday*

Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday is a day of ambiguity. Today's readings take us through both the joys and the pain. So you wonder where to focus your thought. There are many ways of approaching this story: We can focus on the palms and celebrate a day of victory filled with "Hosannas & Rejoicing". We could focus on the suffering; we could look at Pilate and the religious leaders or we could look at the disciples who ran away.

But these are all secondary. The central question to ask is this: who is the man going through this horrific experience? Who is this man of sorrows, condemned by the powers that be, and abandoned by his followers? For this reason I want to focus on this morning's appointed Psalm – Psalm 31. Psalm 31 shows up at an incredibly significant place in the story of Jesus. In fact - Psalm 31 can be seen as a prophesy of all that Jesus would experience during the entire week of Holy Week. Verses 9-15 gives us a brief description of the awful events of Maundy Thursday, as heard in great detail from the Passion of Christ according to St Luke. The appropriateness of Psalm 31 for Palm Sunday becomes even more obvious because Jesus took verse 5 on his lips as he breathed his last on the cross: "Into your hands I commit my spirit".

No wonder all three (3) years of the lectionary cycle we read from Psalm 31 on Palm/Passion Sunday. But verse 13 is really what connects Psalm 31 and the experience of Jesus during this fateful week. Verse 13 says: "For I hear the whispering of many. Terror is on every side, they conspire against me and plot to take my life". This is a perfect prediction of what happen to Jesus on Palm Sunday and in the days following Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem precedes tragedy and violence. Just like the Psalmist, Jesus knows the dark night of the soul. Marilyn Brown Oden, in her book "Wilderness Wonderings" says that the dark night of the soul feels like stepping inside the movie "The Never Ending Story". Where "Nothing" is shattering everything, all that is left is "Emptiness" and a sense of loneliness and despair.

Despite the fact that Jesus had such a big crowd around him, nobody was really with him, he was really on his own. As the hosanna rose from the lips of the crowds out in the streets of Jerusalem whispers of conspiracy filled the rooms where the religious leaders gathered together to plot Jesus' death. We read of that plotting in Luke 19:39 – when the crowds shouted hosanna the Pharisees were displeased. They ordered Jesus to tell his disciples to stop. Then we again hear in verse 47 how the chief priest plotted to kill Jesus (While he was teaching in the Temple)

There was terror on every side. Jesus understood this terrible time all too well. He struggled with that time just as David did in Psalm 31 and as we do in times of terrible distress. The agonised prayer in the garden of Gethsemane complete with sweat like drops of blood revealed the depth of Jesus' terror of what awaited him. To intensify this terror not only were his enemies against him but his friends deserted him. When they were in the Garden they flee into the darkness. His closest friend, Peter, denied ever knowing him. Being rejected by your closest friends when things get tough is perhaps more painful than any beating. His heavenly Father would forsake him. Jesus cried out: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me".

In the end, he was able to cry out with his breath, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". One wonders how Jesus could move from feeling so God forsaken to feeling so confident – that he once again calls God, Father. How could he entrust himself again into his Father's hands? How can we move from terror to trust when terror is on every side. Just like the Psalmist in verses 14-15, Jesus shows us how to trust God. Even though he had moments of despair. And this leads to the crux of Psalm 31, which was the crux for Jesus and is for all of us. "My times are in your hands"

I can't help to think of Ecclesiastes 3 and how it captures the times of our lives. "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. A time for both birth and death; for planting and uprooting; for killing and healing; for war and peace. . . there is an appointed time for everything." Even if we struggle to believe that all of our times are appointments made by God, we can rest secure in the words of Jesus that all our times are His hands. It may feel as though we have fallen into the rough hands of evil people, but we are in the gentle hands of God. Therefore, we cannot only commit our lives into his hands at the end of life, but we can also like Jesus and the Psalmist, trust God completely in all the times of life.

I hope it consoles you to know that when we're afraid, or sad, or confused, or in pain, that the maker and sustainer of life totally understands how you feel. Jesus trusted our heavenly father with his anguish, his pain, and his fear. He committed himself to God, and he also had to remember that his times were in the hands of a good father. Now, maybe you could say it was easy for Jesus because he knew what was coming. We know that 3 days after he prayed this, Jesus broke the power of sin and death and came back to life. But even though Jesus knew what was coming, it's interesting that knowing a good future was coming didn't remove the reality of Jesus' pain in the moment. It was still so hard to bear, that he wanted to escape it. But he chose to trust his good father and obediently committed every part of himself into the hands of God, even as his body was dying.

Just like Jesus had to endure the pain before he could see the other side, sometimes we do too. But we don't face it alone. I want you to remember today that Jesus is alive and he knows how you feel. He's gone through the worst of it himself and He understands. When we call out to the Lord in the midst of suffering we entrust ourselves to a compassionate suffering saviour. He hears you, he knows you, and he loves you. And when we meet him in this honest place, we are able to sing the end of the song with David:

Be strong and let your heart take courage: all you that hope in the Lord.