



Palm Sunday

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 2 April 2023

READINGS

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54

Palm Sunday

Loving Father as we enter Holy Week - centre us today in your holy Word. Liberate us from the distractions of daily life which constrict and close our minds. Help us to hear the truth you intend for us today. Amen.

Today begins that period that Christians refer to as "Holy Week" or "The Passion Week", the last week Jesus live before his crucifixion. Traditionally on this day - , two gospel readings are heard on Palm Sunday. The first describes Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem. The second is the reading of the passion narrative and takes us from the Last Supper through the events of Good Friday to Jesus' death and burial.

It would be much easier to deal with the scripture passage assigned to the celebration of Palm Sunday than it is to choose the story that tell of Jesus' passion. It would be easier to tell you about the parade on Palm Sunday. About how the people were shouting and singing. About how they broke branches off palm trees. About how they waved the branches in order to show the intensity of their joy and expectation. About people taking off their jackets and spreading them on the ground before Jesus.

It would be easier to tell you about how they sang from Psalm 118 of one coming in the name of their beloved King David, in the name of the ancient king to whom God promised an eternal Kingdom. I want to tell you about the parade. I want to tell you about the parade and give you a memory of this great day because the days which followed the parade were so frightening. You see, there was a group of people at the parade that day who had witnessed Jesus' mighty works and were now eager to welcome a triumphant warrior. They expected the Messiah to be the Son of the great King David and lead the people to victory. They expected Jesus to enhance their position in the community. But they were not eager to worship Jesus; they were not pleased with others' worship of Jesus as the Son of God.

They wanted Jesus to be their King and support their causes, but they did not want a parade where people recognized Jesus' rule as sovereign over all. They did not want Jesus to question their motives and were offended when Jesus cursed the fig tree. They did not want Jesus to question their positions of privilege and so they questioned Jesus about his authority. For it was their intent to continue to compromise with justice, to accept the necessity of violence, to ignore suffering, to evade responsibility. And they did. And the rest of the story is one of tragedy. With all the praise & adoration poured onto

Jesus - the love shown towards Him, the respect given Him – that same crowd along with many others turn their Hosannas into jeers of hate?

It would be easier to talk to you about the Palm Sunday parade and:

spare you the pain of watching Judas betray Jesus for money,
spare you the disappointment when Peter denied ever having known him,
spare you the sight of the disciples fleeing when Jesus was arrested,
spare you hearing the crowds jeering him, calling for him to be crucified,
spare you cringing as Jesus was stripped and nailed to the cross,

It would be easier to talk to you about the parade and protect you from the shame of what Jesus did for us. However, such a response exposes my utter lack of understanding God's love. The Passion story of Jesus helps us to understand the amazing love of God. This day introduces a week that is about wondrous love.

Love for you and for me. Love that goes the distance, goes beyond. Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. You may not get it, it may not make sense, it might not add up, your reasoning may not comprehend it, but this is the extent of God's love on display for us. He is going to lay down his life in exchange for your life. He is going to give up his life for your life - all because he loves us and desires to be in relationship with us.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

"To love is to become vulnerable, to risk suffering. If you want to make sure your heart is not broken, you must give your heart to no one, to nothing. Then, it will not be broken. Indeed it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable."

The Passion story of Jesus is all about God loving the world so much that he gave his only son that we might have life eternal - forever. God, who is love, was willing to risk great suffering, willing to risk betrayal and denial and desertion, willing to risk mocking and misunderstanding – to draw us back to him. There has been no pain greater than what God's love can bear. God does not regret the price of love.

We can seek to be content this week with only the story of the parade. While it would be easier to focus on the story of the parade, of people shouting, "Hosanna!" of people singing and dancing and waving branches in praise of the one who came to be their Saviour. We also have to hear the story that God's love for you puts God in a place of vulnerability. Yet God is faithful, willing to risk suffering in order to bring life out of death. Love was and is the meaning of the cross of Christ. "Amazing love how can it be – that Thou my God should die for me"

The cross of Jesus does not promise that we will understand the mystery of Christ's suffering and death in a direct and logical way. It does not promise that we will be able to make sense of the evil and sorrow of this world. What it does promise is this: love. God's love surrounding us and giving us strength, God's love never failing us nor abandoning us.

The cross is the sign of unity, of God's presence with us whatever happens in this life and in this world.

On this Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday, I want to tell you the story of how Jesus has not yet finished telling you how much God loves you.

Amen