

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI  
"Palms"  
Rev. Lou Nyiri  
March 24, 2024 (Palm Sunday)

**Psalm 31:9-16** (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

- <sup>9</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;  
my eye wastes away from grief,  
my soul and body also.
- <sup>10</sup> For my life is spent with sorrow  
and my years with sighing;  
my strength fails because of my misery,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and my bones waste away.
- <sup>11</sup> I am the scorn of all my adversaries,  
a horror<sup>[b]</sup> to my neighbors,  
an object of dread to my acquaintances;  
those who see me in the street flee from me.
- <sup>12</sup> I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;  
I have become like a broken vessel.
- <sup>13</sup> For I hear the whispering of many—  
terror all around!—  
as they scheme together against me,  
as they plot to take my life.
- <sup>14</sup> But I trust in you, O Lord;  
I say, "You are my God."
- <sup>15</sup> My times are in your hand;  
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
- <sup>16</sup> Let your face shine upon your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love.

**Mark 11:1-11** (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

**Jesus's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

**11** When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this: 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' " <sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup> Then he 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.

### **Let us Pray**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come as the fire and burn,  
Come as the wind and cleanse,  
Come as the light and reveal,  
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you, for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

### **Sermon**

Today is Palm Sunday. The day we celebrate:

– Jesus’ triumphal entry processional into Jerusalem to begin what we in the Christian Church call “Holy Week”

– The crowd waved Palm Branches & laid them (along with their cloaks) on the road as Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of

“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!”

This begins, in the Christian Church, the week that changed everything – “Passion Week.”

That word “passion” is pivotal for our faith:

– it is where we get our word *pathos* – which derives from the Latin *passio* meaning “to suffer”

– it meant to submit [to something],

to undergo an experience,

to be completely affected or overcome.

Hellenistic culture did not believe in gods that suffered – gods could not be overtaken.

Yet, we are a people who believe in a God who underwent suffering love on our behalf.

We remember how out of love for God’s creation, the divine self is poured out into human form and undergoes death on the cross.

God overcame distance to become one of us – to know us – to save us.

In this passionate act of self-giving love, God provides the means for our undoing & reclaiming.

In Jesus' death, God declares, Kenda Creasy-Dean writes, that our *nobodiness* gives way to our identification as *God's beloved*.<sup>1</sup>

Our identifying **with** - Our placing faith **in** the One who is God's undoing *undoes* us from that which holds us down.

When we trust in – as John's gospel puts it...

– *"The Word made Flesh*

– *The incarnation of God*

– *The One in whom "we have seen the glory of the father's only son, full of grace and truth"*

– *When we play our faith in Jesus the Christ*

...we are remade and refashioned into new creations.

Jürgen Moltmann describes passion for faithful people – as a **double sense**, "The word 'passion' is well suited," he writes, "to express the central truth of Christian faith. Christian faith lives from the suffering of a great passion and is itself the passion for life which is prepared for suffering."<sup>2</sup>

We are redeemed through Christ's passion on our behalf & in response to that passion we are moved by great passion to do something **about** the world's suffering & sometimes to **endure** suffering on behalf of the world's suffering.

I don't know about you but there are times in life when Kenda Creasy Dean & Jürgen Moltmann's words resonate – deep within my being – especially when I:

I watch news reports...

I listen to radio updates on my morning commute...

I see the death tolls rise in war torn lands...

I sit to pray and sometimes all I can speak is silence...

That is why we need Palm Sunday – and Palm Sunday's counter-cultural message – to remind us of the protest cry that resounded then & resounds now...

It's that one little word the people shouted.

It's the phrase we find ourselves repeating at times – whether aloud or in the silence of our hearts & minds.

Hosanna!

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<sup>1</sup> Dean, Kenda Creasy, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, p. 17, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, p. 19.

Hosanna means “**help us**” – “**save us**”

*Hosanna is a cry for help – it is a protest sign* – so to speak.

Hosanna is not so much a **glory, hallelujah moment** /// It’s more of a **what’s going on...please fix this** moment.<sup>3</sup>

Hosanna is a good word for us.

Amid words like war ravaged lands, inequality and injustice, chronic health concerns, political divisions, violence in schools and violence in our streets – amid words like those, Hosanna is **our** word.

When we find ourselves in such moments – Hosanna is our prayer – *Help Us! Save Us!*

Hosanna is the word we **need** in such times.

Jesus’ Passion captures this as well.

One of the most poignant and significant dimensions of Jesus passion is the way it underscores our humanity.

For those who live in a world filled with suffering of all kinds – sickness and untimely death, family dysfunction, natural disasters, socioeconomic injustice, all the “isms” of our day, and the list goes on –

As we remember Jesus’ suffering and passion, we are reminded of a theology of God as empathetic and in solidarity with those who suffer.

It is a reminder that we are not alone in our suffering – a fact that can be a powerful factor in our resilience.

The Psalmist captures a bit of this when they wrote,

<sup>9</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;

my eye wastes away from grief,

my soul and body also.

<sup>10</sup> For my life is spent with sorrow

and my years with sighing;

my strength fails because of my misery,<sup>[a]</sup>

and my bones waste away.

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<sup>3</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to The Riverside Church’s Digital Minister, Rev. Jim Keat for his discussion of Hosanna vs. Hallelujah in the March 30, 2020 episode of “HOSANNA -- The Word Made Fresh: Palm Sunday.” I borrowed the language and description used by him in his video. The YouTube video can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWerHsOyd2U>

<sup>14</sup> But I trust in you, O Lord;  
I say, "You are my God."

<sup>15</sup> My times are in your hand;  
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

<sup>16</sup> Let your face shine upon your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love.

The psalm writer does not gloss over or sugar coat their situation – the psalmist is not discounting what they're going through or what they're feeling – they are not choosing to overlook or underplay their circumstance – they are however, choosing to lean into the larger theological context – they are placing their faith in God to not abandon nor forsake –

they are choosing to "trust" in God – to embrace and be embraced by God's heseid "steadfast love" – a love that will not let them go (as the hymn declares).

Psalm 31 is a reminder that faith and anguish are not mutually exclusive.

It is perfectly acceptable to stand in the depths of despair – and declare exactly that! – while also remaining a person of sincere faith in a God of love, mercy, and justice.

It is a model of the honest acknowledgement of pain amid faithful obedience. The psalmist chooses not to overlook the reality of the world around them – whether globally or personally – while clinging onto the faith they proclaim (even if that faith is fishing-line thin).

It is that transitional word which begins Psalm 31:14 which holds the key – the strong disjunctive three letter word "but" establishes the contrast between what the psalmist is experiencing/feeling and what the psalmist chooses to believe.

As we experience suffering in today's world or in our personal lives, we do so with honest integrity – avoiding the inclination to put on rose-colored glasses.

We choose to see the world as it is and as it can be.

In times of tragedy or despair, Fred Rogers – of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood is a "go-to" person for me – Mr. Rogers a Presbyterian Minister has given us some pretty good advice in raising children in a troubled world. Shortly after horrific local, national, or international events, his words often circulate throughout the social media realm.

In talking about times such as these, Mr. Rogers recalls words his mother spoke to him, he said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers, Fred. You will always find people who are helping.'"

[Mr. Rogers continues,] “To this day, especially in times of ‘disaster,’ I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world.”

Mother Teresa has spoken words which ring true for me in distressing times, she says, “What I do you cannot do; but what you do, I cannot do. The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.”

Mr. Rogers and Mother Teresa’s advice are good for us – do not deny the terribly sad and scary events that occur – look for the helpers the ones who offer care – also prayerfully look for the ways we can be helpers for those around us.

The cry of Palm Sunday, *Hosanna!*

The words of the Psalmist,

I trust in you, O Lord;

My times are in your hand;

deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

[S]ave me in your steadfast love.

These are calls to prayer – words which reminds us to lean into the promise that into the world’s suffering...there is a God who walks alongside us in our suffering – there is a God who walks with us in our grief – confusion – and isolation –

Hosanna! – *Help Us! Save Us!* –

Hesed – *God’s steadfast love* –

These are our words to remember in the storm...we will eventually get to hallelujah – that’s our faith story after all – though, when we are in Hosanna Moments...may we not forget that we are not alone –

we are surrounded by God and God’s people –

may we choose to see the world as it is and as it can be - & - may we work together – with each other and God to be part of the transforming hands and feet at work bringing this reality into existence.

Amen & Amen.