

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. ² Let Israel say: "His love endures forever." Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. ²² The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵ O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. ²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Palm Sunday – April 4, 2009

Mark 11:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" ⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" ¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" ¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

What would we have done if we had been there two millennia ago? What would we have done if we were tired from traveling from home to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, thinking as we walked that the Roman rule was oppressive and we desperately needed a new Moses to lead us out of bondage and toward a Promised Land. This Promised Land would not be violated by those who worship Caesar. What would we have done when we heard folks speak of a Messiah, of one who comes in the name of the Lord, a mighty man capable of doing things no one has ever seen anyone else do. What would we have done when we heard Jesus was an ancestor of King David; God knows we need that kind of leadership now. Saul killed thousands, but David killed ten thousand. We need a leader who isn't afraid of getting blood on his hands when it's necessary. We need someone who'll make us proud to be God's people. We need hope incarnated. O God, hear our cry. *Hosanna* – save us **now**.

As we came closer to the city we saw people lining the street. A man riding a small donkey was making his way into the city. A small entourage accompanied him. People joyously shouted out what we had been thinking and saying in our journey. "God, save us now. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! Save us now. Save us now!" Folks were so caught in the fervor of the moment some took off their coats and laid them before the man astride the donkey. Palm branches were used, too, and a pathway was made for man and beast to enter the city. People loudly talked to one another saying this man is the one who others have said may well be the Messiah. This man is the one who can do something about Rome. This man healed a blind man. This man made the deaf to hear. Maybe he can help the Roman officials see and hear it would be far better for everyone if they left us alone, for they've been blind and deaf to our cries. They say he raised a man from the dead; perhaps he can raise hope in us all for God knows hope has died a thousand deaths. *Hosanna in the highest!*

We watched him go to the temple, which is what one might expect a priest or a prophet or a king to do. It was a brilliant move, we thought, for it showed God was on his side, God was on our side. "I heard the cries of my people," God told Moses. Some say God told Jesus the same thing. That's

our prayer. God has finally heard our cries and from our oppression God will deliver us with a strong and mighty hand just as God delivered Moses and all those who followed him when the sea parted for our ancestors to pass and then returned with a vengeance and crushed the Egyptians. It's late now, too late in the afternoon to raise an army, though perhaps it's the right time to raise a ruckus and expectations. Soon it will be time for Jesus to face the authorities and repeat what Moses told Pharaoh centuries before, "Let my people go!" We are foolish if we think Rome will capitulate without a fight. Perhaps God will send plagues once more. Maybe the death angel will return. Maybe this time the Romans will be the ones who make an exodus away from the Promised Land rather than toward it. May they wander for a generation before they get home, too!

Is that what we would have thought if we had been there? Would we have hoped our enemies would get what we thought was coming to them? Would we have been hungry for hope as we spread our coats, our festal branches and our dreams before Jesus? Would we have seen this moment as a prime time for God to act in our history so we might be free? Would we be spoiling for a fight, or hoping one would come and take the fight to the Romans. Would we have stood silent as Jesus rode into the city, and once others began to shout would we suddenly discover our voices were raised in chorus with theirs? Would we hope Jesus would emulate his ancestor David and take matters and a sword into his own hands?

Would we have made Jesus into what we wanted him to be? Is that what Palm Sunday is about? Perhaps we would not have made him in our image, a copy of ourselves. But would we have formed him into a mold of our making, shaped by our desires, expectations, hopes and dreams. Would we have made Jesus into the image of what we thought a Messiah ought to be?

Don't we still? After Peter acknowledged Jesus was the Son of the living God Jesus told Peter and the disciples what Jesus understood being the Son of the living God entailed. Peter told Jesus he was wrong, and with that Jesus called him Satan and told him to get out of his way. Peter wanted Jesus to fulfill his expectations and Jesus refused to be molded into Peter's messianic image. Mary and Martha were upset Jesus didn't make it to their

home to see Lazarus before he perished. “If you had been here my brother would not have died.” Lazarus did rise from the dead, but only after Jesus added his tears to Mary and Martha’s. Perhaps Jesus wept, in part, because he knew he could never be exactly what everyone wanted him to be. Perhaps we cried because his friend and his ability to satisfy every demand were dead and only Lazarus would emerge from that tomb. James and John, trusted disciples, asked for positions of honor in the coming Kingdom which indicated they didn’t understand much about the coming Kingdom after all. James and John wanted Jesus to comply with their request and with their understanding of discipleship. They wanted to make Jesus who they wanted him to be, wanted him to do what they wanted him to do.

Perhaps what makes the triumphal entry triumphant is the triumph of our wills and our desires. Perhaps the great irony is that for a moment our will is victorious and Jesus becomes what we want him to be. It literally is the death of him. Jesus will not answer all our questions, or at least will not answer them as we believe he should. Like Pilate we pose our questions and Jesus is silent or offers truths difficult if not impossible to see. Given the choice we choose Barabbas instead of Jesus. Barabbas is more easily understood. Barabbas thinks more like we do. Barabbas is one of us. It’s easier to make Barabbas what we want him to be.

The same can be said of Judas, I’m convinced. Judas wears the black hat, the dark clothes and is depressed. He’s sullen, hollow and withdrawn. He steals from the treasury. He never followed Jesus, not really. He greets Jesus with a kiss and the clink of coins in his pocket. He is evil incarnate. That’s how we have made him, the way we have fashioned him. It makes it easier for us, for if Judas is evil than we don’t have to consider that perhaps there was a bit of evil in the disciples, that there’s evil in all disciples including us. Judas isn’t one of us, we believe. It’s easier to make Judas what we want him to be.

Jesus refuses to comply. Jesus will not become what we want him to be. He will not be shaped or molded by us no matter how hard we try. We want Jesus on our side, asking Jesus to come to where we are, to believe as we believe, to do what we believe ought to be done. We want our enemies

vanquished, and Jesus tells us to love our enemies. We want Jesus to eradicate poverty, and Jesus shows us everyone is our neighbor. We want Jesus to make us strong, and God provides us opportunities to build our strength. We want Jesus to give us patience, and God provides us opportunities to be patient. We want Jesus to give us courage, and God provides us opportunities to be courageous. It's not what we wanted. We want *Hosanna*; save us **now!**

Save us from toxic relationships. Save us from our boss, our neighbor. Save us from economic uncertainty. Save us from the threat of terror, whatever form terror may take. Save us from misery; make misery go away, whatever misery we might see or feel. Save us from whoever or whatever oppresses us. Save us, God, with a strong and mighty hand, or save us from the back of a lowly donkey. Save us now.

God does save us, though I think it is not often the way we want to be saved. Jesus' strong and mighty arms embrace a cross. Jesus' hands are pierced. Jesus dies and is resurrected. We love the end of the story; it's the chapters before that are harder to take, more difficult to understand, and more dangerous to put in practice. To declare *Save us now* is to take up our cross and follow him, knowing Jesus will never be molded into who we want him to be.

This bit of bread and sip of juice provide us the opportunity to declare once more we wish to take up our cross. They are *Hosannas* raised to our lips. The bread and cup are our lives placed before him. Let us share this supper, not simply because others are lining the streets and shouting his name, but because we are willing to have our lives shaped by the One who refuses to be made in our image. This we do in remembrance of him.

Lord's Supper

We sing a hymn, our voices raised in praise of the one who enters our lives. Let us lay our coats, our branches, our lives before the Messiah. Save us now, O God, from the tyranny of our selfish expectations and desires. Encourage us to take up a cross and follow your will and way.