

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
Davenport, Iowa
The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday – April 2, 2023/Year A
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words only reveal the greater glory of our Triune God. AMEN

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The freshly cut palm branches pave the way with the shouts of joy – **“Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna!”** The freshly cut palm branches underfoot the young colt, gently bearing the one who is the One, the holy One, the Son of God, the branch of King David. And this one Jesus bears all our expectations as THE Messiah King, to free us from Rome’s tyranny and establish the kingdom of God’s chosen people again! **But then ...**

The crackle of the dried palms crunch under the crush of the crowd. The sound lost in the din of angry voices, lost under the weight of the mob now shouting, **“Crucify him! Crucify him! CRUCIFY HIM!”**

The crackle of dried palm branches buried by the shouts of an angry mob is the sound of a world turned upside down. The proclaimed Messiah is now on trial before Rome’s puppet King Herod and their governor Pilate, accused by the Temple keepers, the keepers of the Law. Our EXPECTATIONS of the true Messiah King in this Jesus is nothing like we expect. Now our RESENTMENTS fuel our anger. No longer **“Hosanna”** but only **“Crucify him! Crucify him! CRUCIFY HIM!”**

We do not know if any of the angry mob at the trial are the same ones on this day. One crowd could have greeted Jesus as a King when he entered Jerusalem. Another crowd, fueled by the accusations of the Sadducees and Pharisees, could have shouted for Pilate to put him to death. However, over the millennia of historical research, of Christian preaching and teaching, the two crowds are seen as one. Not because of solid historic data, but because of instinct forged in the fires of life experience. Experience shows **expectations are premeditated resentments.**

It was into this uneasy *pax Romana* that Jesus rode on a young colt as the crowd shouted **“Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”** So much for the peace of Rome. Whatever else that has been said about Jesus, he was put to death as a threat to Roman rule, to the Jewish King Herod’s control, and the powerful keepers of the Temple. Jesus’ teaching and living and loving turned the world upside down, and this threat to the way things work could not be tolerated by those in power.

This is where the gospel accounts of Jesus differ from most of human history and literature up until this time. Jesus' story was not the first story of redemptive violence. It was, however, the first time the story played out like this. Yet the idea of killing Jesus to bring peace is clearly found here in Matthew. The equation is **unanimity less one**. We all agree with one another, with those with the power, except that this Jesus is the one preaching that God is love and we should love everyone – sinners and outcasts alike, justice and mercy for all, God's peaceable kingdom reigns. The formula to keep the peace EVERYONE wanted was simple – **remove the one, and unanimity returns**. The status quo is preserved.

It is still true. Christianity is judged not just by what we SAY but the WAY Christians act. It is hard to separate Christ from being a Christians. In fact, it is impossible. Our faith on the inside matches what we show on the outside. Yet, even though we may all act wrongly, preserving our self-interests and safety over the other, the truth of Jesus remains. This is part of the way the world was getting turned upside down in Jesus' life and ministry, then and now. If Jesus is God incarnate, God made man, then it was possible for the one suffering and crucified at the hands of the many to be right and true.

There would have been those voices on the edge of the crowd. People who wanted to speak yet remained silent. There would have been voices of reason in the angry mob – voices silenced by the shouting of the resentment filled crowd, silenced by their own fear. Their silence equals consent.

There would have been some who felt foolish to have ever proclaimed Jesus as a King. Some who had waved palm branches and shouted at the top of their lungs now wish they had remained silent. Some hide for their life in the shadowy corners, some of them he called **friends**. From the joy of that entrance into the Holy City of God, to the darkness of the Friday we call "Good," the crowd went from praise to derision, from joy to anger, from **expectation to resentment**.

It is time for the crowd to go home. There is nothing more to see, only three dead men hanging from crosses. The dry broken palm branches crackle under their feet as the mob shuffles home, exhausted by their vented anger, exhausted by another false prophet. The promise of hosannas are now crushed into dust, and unto dust this day returns.

"My song is love unknown, my Savior's love of me ..."

AMEN