

“Jesus’ Rebuff”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Palm Sunday, March 20, 2016
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Scriptures: Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 Luke 19: 28-40

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29

A Song of Victory

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

²Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of
the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Luke 19: 29-40

Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Litany of the Palms *

(Please stand if you are able, hold high your palm branches, and repeat after me.)

Hosanna!

Hosanna!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

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

God save us!

Hosanna!

In Christ we are united!

Christ comes for all people!

All ages!

All races!

All creeds!

All classes!

All nations!

The rich!

The poor!

The L G B T!

The straight!

Men, women, and children!

All people, united in Christ!

Hosanna!

God save us!

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

Amen!

*Adapted from an original litany created by the Rev. George E. Calvert (1928-2005) while serving as Pastor of Church of the Son of Man and then Church of the Living Hope, East Harlem, NY.

Sermon

A child bowed her head and began to offer God her prayer.
“Dear God,” she said,
*“I bet it is very hard for you to love everybody
all around the world all the time., and especially in our church!
There are only four people in my family.
Try as I might, I can never do it.”*

Yes, how many of us find it challenging to get along
with all our family members, all the time, always and forever,
amen.

So we are not surprised when,
in the bigger, wider family of the church,
not to mention in the city and nation and the whole
wide world,
that there are many occasions
when our unity and harmony
come under strain, stress, and
under scrutiny.
And yet unity is something we
desperately need
as the whole people of God,
living side by side as we do
in a broken, fragmented, and sometimes
hostile world.

Recently our Hand Bell Choir worked really
hard
to practice and then offer a unique anthem to God in worship
and praise.
Called “Peace Canon,”
the anthem opens with discordant notes,
each note played haphazardly, rung without rhythm.
The piece begins with such a jarring string of notes
and bizarre timing
that it’s almost painful to hear, much less to play.
However, after a few measures a melody began to take shape.
Soon the bells began to ring together, in a unifying effort,
as a peaceful anthem emerged to round it out
and bring the discordant piece into harmony.
We the Hand Bell Choir witnessed with grace and a

prayer and mad musical skills (!)
that we might move from dissonance to consonance,
from division and discord into Christian unity and
harmony.

Just as “Peace Canon” eventually evolves
to become pleasing to our ears and soothing to our souls,
so too is God pleased whenever neighbors
resolve to love,

agree to differ,
unite to serve,
and break bread
together.

We find evidence of
this living prayer throughout
the Holy Scriptures.

Taken together, the
Word of God and our
collective experience

bear testimony to the power of spiritual unity,
unity in Spirit, Body, and Mind in the human context.
Unity and harmony in community is something that
God seeks after,
prays for, sent Jesus Christ to earth for,
and extends to us the tools and will to make it
happen.

People from all walks of life united to serve
– even and especially in the midst
of profound disagreements, discord and division –
is something Jesus meditates on, lives for, prays about,
and then lays down his life for, for us, for all of us.

The Gospel of John (Chapter 17) records Jesus’ prayer
for unity,
a prayer for His disciples before His crucifixion.^[1]
Jesus prays for his followers to be blessed,
blessed with God’s gifts of truth, holiness, joy and a strong
sense of mission.

Before he goes to take on the cross for the sake of the world
Jesus pauses to pray for unity.

He beseeches God on behalf of his followers “that they may be

one.”

He says this not once, or twice, but three times (Vs. 11, 21 and 22).

Then Jesus prays, “May they be brought to complete unity.” (Vs. 23)

Unity in the Spirit will not, never has been, and never will come to fruition

due to wishful thinking.

We look to Jesus Christ, who models and emulates the pathway.

First and most importantly,

Jesus prays before he prepares.

After he prepared, he practiced.

After he practiced, he proclaimed.

You might say that His orthopraxis, His right practice,

precedes His orthodoxy, His right belief.

Jesus prayed, prepared, and practiced loving God and God’s people

long before he proclaimed the Good News,

yet proclaim he did

and with gusto and grace, with joy and sincerity.

Jesus rejoiced when his followers did the same.

How many days and ways did Jesus tell a soul, “Go home, and proclaim what God has done for you!”

So, on this lovely Palm Sunday,

when we reflect on a crowd as described in the Gospels

becoming swept away with hope,

yoked as one in unity of the Spirit,

singing and shouting their love for

God,

we, too, sense the joy.

We, too, would like to get swept away and filled anew with the

power of the Spirit.

We, too, yearn to see the song
“We are one in the Spirit” become a
living reality.

There is a way.

Loving, not liking, our
neighbor is the way.

In a sermon that aired on
Christmas Eve 1967,

Martin Luther King Jr. remarked how “happy” he was that
Jesus had not said,

“Like your enemies,” because there are some people that

“I find pretty difficult to like...”

I can’t like anybody who would bomb my home.

I can’t like anybody who would exploit me.

I can’t like anybody who would trample over me with injustices.

I can’t like them.

I can’t like anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out.”

However, he said, he could love them.

King articulated what was at stake for him in loving people whom he
could not like,

those who would be so much easier to hate.

*“We will not only win freedom for ourselves [through nonviolence],
we will so appeal to your heart and conscience*

that we will win you in the process

and our victory will be a double victory.”

King believed that to abandon nonviolence

was to lose not just the double victory but any victory.

“Hate is injurious to the hater as well as the hated,” he said.

“Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

Overcoming hate with love takes guts.

And a whole lotta prayerful planning!

We follow a Risen Son who made careful plans and
preparations.

He sent his followers before him into Jerusalem

to find a colt, to rev up the crowd,

to make the Passover room ready,

and to sit with him what would become the
Lord’s Last Supper.

Listen for the Word of God (from Luke 19):

³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives,

the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice

for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,
*“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”*

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him,

“Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

⁴⁰ Jesus answered, *“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”*

My Bible subtitles this passage *“Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem”*

Yes, Jesus enters into Jerusalem and our lives with triumph,
and we are singing, singing for our lives, end of story!

End of story...

If only this tale and our own faith walk could always stay on an “up” note,

frozen in time and space while leaping up in the air,
like the Toyota commercials of old.

His entry into Jerusalem is like one of those mountain-top experiences

that so many modern tales like build up to and then end on.

Frodo tosses the Ring into Mt. Doom and liberates Middle Earth, end of story.

Medical Examiner Scarpetti solves the case, end of story.

Percy Jackson and fellow demigods save the Olympians, end of story.

Harry Potter and friends defeat Lord Voldemort, end of story.

However, my Bible and yours remind us this moment of triumph
is an introduction to human experiences
of trauma and temptation, tribulation and tragedy
before dawn breaks on Easter morning.

Within hours of the same week after Jesus entered into Jerusalem,
a follower of Jesus would betray him.

Within hours after the betrayal,

a follower of Jesus would strike at the ear of an arresting officer.

Within hours after the arrest,
a crowd that included followers of Jesus would turn on Him
and yell, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
Within hours after the conviction by acclamation,
Jesus was crucified by fellow human beings
who hammered nails into his hands and feet
and left him outside to die.
See how quickly the harmony and overarching melodies of grace
devolve into dissonance and discord, and damaging divisions.
How quickly we turn from welcoming souls into an angry mob,
from friends into betrayers,
from advocates for peace into practitioners of violence.

What happened?
Did someone flip a switch?
Does this display of the extremes of human behavior
shock us, sadden us, disgust us, shame us...
or are we so calloused, so immune, so numb, so
desensitized
that we take it for granted, as inevitable, as
normal?

And yet, my friends, it is this same crowd, this same fickle church,
this same collection of misfits and misbehavers, of saints and
sinners
that God gives to Jesus and says,
"Take these, my people, and pray for them,
love them,
lead them into living lives
of Christian unity, of service,
of wholeness."

One day a gentle soul
despaired of seeing any hope,
and approached Albert Einstein to ask
what weapons World War III would be fought with.
Einstein said, "*I know not with what weapons World
War III will be fought,
but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.*"

My friends, let not get to that point.
Lord have mercy, let's not need to go there.
Let's not force God's hand by means of our own negligence and pride,
so that the Lord would need in some distant day for the love
of Jesus

to raise up sticks and stones
to welcome in a new day, to pray for peace, to
advocate for justice.

Recently a local pastor and I shared stories of
church mission trips.

He invited us to join his congregation by going
with them to Nicaragua,
and I invited them to join us next year when we go to the
Dominican Republic.

He said that the Year of Jubilee, the Acceptable Year of our
Lord, is coming.

The Year of Jubilee is when the debts of the poor are forgiven,
when God's people prayerfully give families and entire
nations a fresh start.

Our neighbor said, "Going on mission trips,
doing community service programs are well and good,
and they make a difference.

You know, some of the world's countries are saddled
with 40, 45% debts,
debts that most likely they will never crawl out from under.
Yet sometimes I think about the woman who went walking
along a riverbed.

She hears a cry for help,
sees a soul floating by in the river's currents,
and jumps into the cold water to safely haul him
ashore.

Just as she finishes CPR and he is breathing on his
own,
she hears another cry for help,
and Lordy be, there is a second soul drowning in the
fast moving current.

She leaps back into the water and rescues him.
By now a crowd has gathered.

She hears a third cry for help; except this time she starts to run.

Some in the crowd ask her why she's running away, leaving this one to drown?

"I'm not running away," she says. "I'm running upstream. I am going to find out and then put a stop to whoever is throwing these people into the river!"

The people of God, united, will never be defeated.

Pray as one in Christ.

Prepare, practice, and proclaim the Good News.

If necessary, use words.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Call to Offering and Communion

Jesus instructed his disciples, saying, "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying [the colt]?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " (Luke 19: 31) While Jesus said, "The Lord needs it," we may well wonder what does God need. We've heard people ask who needs God. Maybe now is a good time to ponder what God needs in order to accomplish what must be done.

Do you think God needs the resources that are at our disposal? Might the Lord require our talents and treasure? Do you think that our gifts were God's in the first place? How about our acts of compassion; our hands that hold; our voices that speak the truth in love; our eyes that see and identify with the last, the lost and the least; our feet that walk beside the hurt and the hurting; our minds that can explore the vastness of the universe and connect the longest distance, the one between heart and head. Do you believe that God has need of these? Give your life, your love, your all to the Risen Savior. Come to the Table.

[1] Paragraph paraphrased from sermon "Jesus Prays for the Church (5) "Praying for Unity" (John 17:11-23) Mairangi Bay Community

Church Website, North Shore, Auckland.