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 Palm and Passion Sunday

***From Palms to Passion: Facing our Fears with Jesus***  
***Luke 23:1-5, 13-47***

*Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.*

**2** *They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."*

**3** *Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so."*

**4** *Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man."*

**5** *But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."*

*Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people,*

**14** *and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him"*

**15** *Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.*

**16** *I will therefore have him flogged and release him."*

**17**

**18** *Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!"*

**19** *(This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.)*

**20** *Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;*

**21** *but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"*

**22** *A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him."*

**23** *But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed.*

**24** *So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.*

*25 He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.*

*26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.....*

*32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.*

*33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.*

*34 [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.*

*35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"*

*36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine*

*37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

*38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews.*

*39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

*40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"*

*41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."*

*42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

*43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

*44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,*

*45 while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.*

*46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.*

*47 When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."*

Today is know as ***Palm AND Passion Sunday***,

because ***both*** things happen before Easter—

Jesus' ***entrance*** into Jerusalem, waved by Palm branches, and his ***crucifixion***.

And we ***can't truly appreciate*** the miracle of Easter unless we know about this whole Holy week!

Not everyone can attend Holy Week services,  
but without the events of Holy Week,  
we miss the reason for our celebration of the Resurrection!

At our Maundy Thursday worship this week,  
We remember the Last Supper, the foot washing,  
AND the arrest and death of Jesus.

It's important, because there is ***no resurrection, without death***,  
No empty tomb, without the defeat of sin and death on the cross!

So today we hear ***BOTH stories***—  
the PALM,  
and the PASSION.

Remember, that Jesus ***has told his disciples*** all along  
that he would go into Jerusalem and be killed,  
but we cannot assume they understood  
what would really happen to their Teacher and Lord.  
I doubt they understand on Palm Sunday  
what would happen ***with those same crowds*** just a few days later.

Watching Jesus coming into Jerusalem would be kind of like us  
at a huge ***homecoming parade*** of our favorite sports team  
after they won a championship game!  
Or like going to a big rally for a returning hometown war hero.  
Lots of people, noise, praise and people going a little wild!

The disciples may have been thinking—now this is more like it!  
This is the kind of Savior we've been waiting for,  
the kind of ***reception Jesus deserves!***  
Everyone waving palm branches that day would have been ***riding high.***

That's one of the things that is so incredible about Palm Sunday.  
Jesus comes in to shouts of blessing and hope,  
to people praising God.  
But ***do they really know*** where this is headed?  
Do they understand ***where the power of God really comes from?***

Have they any idea that it will come *in love, on a cross*,  
from His blood shed, to take away our sin?

Some in the crowd probably wanted to be a part of the *power and fame*.  
Others were there because they had been healed,  
or *transformed* by Jesus in some way.

This week I realized there were probably *lots of outcasts* in that crowd—  
praising God because they had been welcomed by the Son of God.  
There were people of lowly stature,  
coming to give praise to the One who had lifted them up!  
Verse 37 says they were praising Jesus  
*“because of all the deeds of power they had seen”*.  
And there had been plenty to see in his three years of ministry!

WE know the crowds will turn against him in a few days,  
but on Palm Sunday there is *pure joy and celebration*.  
with good reason!  
Jesus is the King of Kings, the Son of God!  
He is ushering in the new kingdom of God!

Jesus comes into Jerusalem surrounded by people adoring him,  
In all his *power*---and *we see his power*.  
He knows exactly where to send them for a donkey,  
so he would arrive just like the prophets foretold.  
He knows the response of the crowds, even before it begins.

As the crowd swells, some of the Pharisees tell Jesus,  
*“Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”*  
Jesus tells the Pharisees,  
*I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.*  
In other words, *You can't stop this*, no one can—the crowd, the procession,  
and everything else that's about to happen.

As we continue to see so much hate and division in our world right now,  
*imagine* what it would be like to be *in a crowd---praising God!*  
When have *you been overcome* by the power of God?  
so much that you couldn't stop praising and thanking God?  
That's what's happening as Jesus comes into town!

**Why do the Pharisees** try to stop this joyous procession?  
 Well, all of the religious leaders were **AFRAID**.  
 They realize someone else is riding into town.  
 This is Passover week,  
 a time when any political or religious unrest or riots  
 would be met with the **full force of Roman soldiers**.

So, as Jesus is entering Jerusalem from the east,  
**Pontius Pilate** is coming in from the other side of the city—  
 to make sure the crowds understand **who REALLY is in power!**  
 And it's Rome.

Two different leaders, with **two different agendas**.  
 One comes in the **name of the Lord**,  
 bringing **courage, and hope**.  
 The other comes in the **name of force**,  
 bringing **fear**.

So we see Jesus in all his glory on Palm Sunday,  
 but **we know what awaits him**.  
 On Thursday night, **Maundy Thursday**,  
 he will eat his Last Supper and wash his disciples' feet.

Late that night he will pray in the **Garden of Gethsemane**,  
 asking God to take away the cup,  
 when he is arrested, as an innocent man,  
 turned over to the authorities by one of his own disciples, Judas Iscariot.

On Good Friday he will be **tortured, crucified, and die on a cross**—  
 that hideous capital punishment of the Romans—  
 between two common criminals.  
 And he will **offer forgiveness** for the crowds,  
 and **grace** for a criminal, even as he dies.

**This Passion** of Jesus,  
 that part of Holy Week that leads to the cross,  
 is so important right now, in 2019.

We live in a **fearful world**,  
 And the crowd who praised him on Sunday,  
 and shouted crucify him on Friday,  
 was a **crowd of fearful people**.  
**Afraid of what might happen there in Jerusalem.**

Jesus was sent to his death by Pilate,  
 a **fearful ruler** who used **violence** to pacify the crowds,  
 in response to the **quiet, courageous humility** of Jesus.

**And what about those crowds?**  
 Would we have been among them?  
 It's a question many have asked over the years.  
**Would we have been part** of the crowd  
 that praised him as he entered Jerusalem,  
 and shouted 'crucify him' days later?

In a way, **we all WERE there**.  
 And, we all know the way a mob works, the power of **crowd mentality**.  
 And we've probably all been to **a concert, or a rally, or a big game**, right?  
 And we've seen this power, we've felt it.

That's **part of the appeal** of a big game, or rally, or a concert---  
 the chance to be **swept up** in the moment,  
**overcome** with emotion, and energy.

Most of our days we keep to ourselves,  
 not much overwhelms us with emotion and energy day to day.  
**But sports, politics, music—**  
**these are times we can let our hair down, so to speak!**

But there can be an **ugly side to a crowd**, right?  
 There are things people will do in a crowd,  
 that they would not do on their own.  
 Something about all the people, the noise, the energy—  
 it can lead people **to do and say things**,  
 that should never be done, or said, much less in public.

Isn't it interesting that this is the pathway to the cross?  
**through an angry crowd**, shouting 'crucify him'!  
 through a **fearful leader** Pilate,  
 afraid of what the crowds might do if he doesn't satisfy them.  
 Through a **fearful crowd**,  
 people intimidated by Jesus-- who has the power to draw a crowd,  
 and proclaim a new kingdom of God,  
 The courage to say he is the King of the Jews, the Messiah.

We've been talking about **Fear** all throughout Lent,  
 and it's role in our lives.  
 We are afraid of **so many things**----  
 failure, loneliness, illness, change,  
 people who are different....  
 and in the **Passion story, fear is a big player** as well.

**Fear leads Jesus** to be arrested, accused, tortured, and crucified!  
 He was an innocent man, put to death in the most horrible way.  
 A way meant to make others afraid of Rome.

Yet throughout the entire ordeal, **Jesus is not afraid**.  
 He asks God to take the cup from him in the Garden,  
 but prays, *not my will, but thine be done*.  
 He **stands courageously** before Pilate, before the crowds,  
 not even trying to defend himself,  
 or get out of what he knows awaits him.

Jesus **calmly takes**—the beating, the flogging, the accusations, the mocking,  
 and finally being nailed---to a wooden cross.  
 He even **prays** for the crowds,  
**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**.  
 And he promises a criminal to his side,  
**today you will be with me in Paradise**.  
 He bravely breathes his last while praying:  
**"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"**.

Can you even **imagine**—this kind of courage?

We **learn so much** from Jesus' ministry—his teaching, preaching, and healing. But we also learn so much from his last hours on earth. We see in him an **EXAMPLE of living Unafraid**—with courage and hope, in the most troubled times!

Think about that—

**Pilate was the epitome of a fearful man**—

he gave into the demands of a crowd,

knowing full well that Jesus was innocent!

Pilate was afraid—what would they do to him, if he didn't please them!

It makes me wonder---

When do we allow **our need to please** others, override our pursuit of truth and justice?

When do we **allow the crowds**

to lead us down the wrong path, out of fear?

Or do we know what it means to be courageous

And **stand up** for truth and righteousness?

When have we done this? When have we **stood up**?

When have we **held to our convictions**,

**ignoring what the crowds** are saying, or doing?

And how is **God asking us to do just that, today**?

**Will we allow FEAR to rule** in our hearts and minds?

Or do we stand on that promise found in 2 Timothy 1:7:

*God has **not given us a spirit of fear**, but of power, love, and sound mind!*

The power of Jesus **is a DIFFERENT kind of power**, isn't it?

It's the power we affirm today, from Philippians 2—

the power of **humility, service, and obedience**.

The power that comes from **following God's call**,

no matter what comes our way.

It's the power that comes **from love, not force**,

**from grace, not violence**.

it's the power of a **sound mind**—

or as Paul puts it so eloquently in Philippians 2,

it's the power of having the **same mind as Jesus**.

When we think about what it means,  
to ***live without being a slave to fear***,  
We have this example of Jesus---going all the way to the cross,  
And of his death—defeating all the sin that put him there.

***How will we follow Him***, our Savior Jesus?  
How will we follow Him,  
as we wave the palms and praise God for his power?  
How will we follow Him,  
and turn away from the crowds calling for his death?

***How will YOU follow Him?***  
Today, this week, this year?  
In a world that pursues personal power, violence, and might,  
A world that exploits and capitalizes on all of our fears?

***Only you and God know the answer to that---***  
only you know what God is saying to you,  
right now, right where you are, today.

All I know, is that ***God IS speaking to you***,  
and ***God IS at work, in all of our lives***,  
the question is, will we ***listen***, or not?

Will we ***pay attention---***during this Holy Week?

Friends, ***God has something to tell you***.  
God has something for you to ***do***.  
Not an addition to your to do list,  
But a deeper ***purpose, a mission, a vision***.  
This is something that brings ***joy, and hope to you!***

And it might make us shake a bit, to hear God's call,  
we might feel some anxiety or fear,  
but if we follow God's call---not the crowds—  
if we follow Jesus' voice,  
We can ***live WITHOUT fear controlling us!***  
We can live with ***courage, and hope***, even in troubled times.

***That is what we see in our Savior Jesus,***  
 from the moment he entered Jerusalem, that Holy Week.  
 To the night he spent eating and serving his disciples.  
 This is what we see as he is accused, and beaten, and crucified.

***NO FEAR.***

Who doesn't want that?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of Palm and Passion Sunday:***  
 We can live in Fear,  
 Or we can ***face it, with our faith*** in Jesus.

We can ***live afraid*** of so much and so many around us,  
 Or we can ***live in the courage and hope,***  
 of God's awesome hand upon us,  
 and Jesus' presence right beside us.

***It's our choice—to pursue real life in Christ,***  
 or ***give up our lives*** to the powers of this world.

As we enter this Holy Week,  
 may we ***surrender our Fear,***  
 and ***embrace our Faith—***  
 in the One who ***leads us, to Jerusalem, Gethsemane, and the cross.***  
 And to that, all God's people said: Amen!