



Palm Sunday
Light of Christ Anglican Church
The Rev. Mike Moffitt
April 10, 2022

The Very Stones Will Cry Out

Text: [Luke 19:28–40](#)

When I was a kid I loved to read and still do. I really love history but in growing up I had a passion for reading biographies of famous historical figures. As I recall I read all of the biographies available in the Williamson Road branch of the Roanoke public library. I loved to read about what life was like for people raised in other times, cultures, and places.

When I was six years old we moved into a new subdivision that had been recently developed. Behind our street there were three other streets and then a very large, wooded area where over the years I often went to explore what was there and sometimes pretend that I was a famous pioneer, explorer, or a brave soldier like those I read about.

Reading biographies taught me that there were people who were willing to risk all that they had, including their lives for something that they felt was more important than themselves. Often they took the risk hoping that their efforts would be rewarded, and the goal achieved would prove better for everyone. I loved to read stories of the beginning of our country and of those who gave their lives so that we could live in freedom.

As I grew older the subdivision expanded and the woods were replaced by several new streets and many new houses. However, those earlier years of reading about those who I viewed as heroes and pretending that I was like

them as I played in the woods helped fashion me. After I became a Christian I started reading biographies of famous men and women who lived their lives to glorify the God who had not only saved them from their sins and therefore Hell but introduced them to what life really was intended to be. A life where through Christ they could develop an intimate relationship with God that changed their focus from themselves to God and their neighbor.

To this day I still love to read or listen to stories about famous Christians who laid down their lives so that others might know and understand God's holy word and Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

In [Hebrews 11](#) the author writes about those down through the ages who have been examples of faith in the Word of God and His faithfulness to them. The whole chapter lists person after person who moved in faith and obedience to the commands of God because they believed that He was exactly who He claimed to be. They were willing to live and die, sometimes in horrible ways for the glory of God and the joy of presenting the hope of God found in Jesus Christ to those who were without hope.

Chapter 12 of Hebrews begins with.

Therefore, since we surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

I love this exhortation that believers should consider those who have gone before them in faithfulness, but I find myself adding to that list those who are far more current than the list in Hebrews 11. I have many that I could

name who have diligently given their lives to the proclamation of the word of God and the truth claims within it. One of them is J.I. Packer, he wrote in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*,

A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a God in man's image, and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all.

I believe that many who would confess themselves to be Christians have settled for a much smaller view of God, a god who is more easily managed and reminiscent of a kind old grandfather figure. During this Lenten season we have considered the reality of our sin and the absolute need for a Savior. Our focus has been on the power of the cross to set us free from sin and death, something we could not do for ourselves. It reminds us that only in Christ Jesus can we come to God by faith, in repentance and find salvation.

I wanted to begin this sermon this way as a reminder that this Holy Week points us to the reality of the cross. This should continue to impact our walk with the Lord on a daily basis. In other words, it should change us. We will never be in the place where we have all of God that we need. We need all of Him that He is willing to pour into us. If we are to be the living witnesses of Christ to a lost and dying world we must become more like Him and less like the world.

I've been reminded of that the past few weeks. I have seen several Church marquees inviting people to bring their children to an Easter Egg hunt and I assume that many will be giving their children Easter baskets full of candy. Don't misunderstand me, I do like candy but can't find any reason to eat it in remembrance or celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As I consider the agony on the cross I find no reason to think of an imaginary rabbit—who lays eggs. This week we must ask God’s Spirit to refocus our minds on what it cost our Savior to pay for our sins and what it has cost millions since then to continue the proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel. We need to ask God to refocus our hearts on His majesty, glory, power, mercy and love, and that He will anoint us to be the ones who lay down our lives for the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbors.

Today is Palm Sunday and we enter what is known to the church as “Holy Week.” Since Ash Wednesday on March 2nd we have been in the season of Lent, which will end on April 14th, Maundy Thursday. We have focused on the cross of Christ while we remember that it was our sin that put Jesus there.

This year’s Palm Sunday lectionary readings followed the drama from the “Triumphal Entry” into Jerusalem as we processed into the church, but then the Gospel lesson after we begin takes us through the last few days in Jesus’ life to his betrayal. In our gospel reading this morning you have had the story read to you in its entirety. Now, for a few moments longer, we will consider the implications and importance of the greatest story of self-sacrifice ever told.

Jesus knew the prophecies foretelling his coming yet acted with love and courage knowing fully what would happen to him. Consider a few descriptions from our reading of [Isaiah 52 & 53](#),

His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind... He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief... but he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not

his mouth, like a lamb he is led to the slaughter... Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him, he has put him to grief...

Jesus knew that what he had to do must be done alone. Though there were many who assured him that they would stand with him no matter what. In [Luke 22:33](#), Simon Peter tells Jesus that he was ready to go to prison or even die for him. I have no doubt that he actually believed that he would respond with courage and even die for his Master. Jesus knew better and told him that in reality Peter would deny three times that he even knew him. Jesus knew that even the Father would turn away from him as he bore the sins of the world upon himself, by becoming sin.

You and I can read the accounts in the story, but we still have no way to fully understand the implications of what that meant for Jesus. There had never been even one moment where the Trinity had not lived in perfect unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now for the first time the Father, who is perfect purity, righteousness and holiness would have to turn away from his beloved Son in the moment of his great need.

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden there had never been a human who was perfect in purity and sinless, until Jesus. Because of that we can't really understand how sin can be such an affront to God. To many, this whole scenario seems foolish and an overblown reaction on the part of God. More like a petulant child. Couldn't he just live and let live? Was all this death and sorrow, and talking about wrath, justice and hell really necessary?

The holiness and purity of God is something we have no capacity to thoroughly understand, but many places in Scripture show that God cannot reveal Himself to us physically at present or our human bodies would simply be consumed.

When Adam was created, he did live in the presence of God and things were vastly different. However, when Adam chose to disobey God, his relationship and existence before God was fractured and death entered the created world for the first time. Since that moment, God has been forced to distance Himself from us for our own survival—this is actually an act of mercy from God! We can't be in the full presence of the God who is without sin, morally completely pure, and undefiled in any way.

The fact that men and women don't see the "big deal" is actually a perfect example of their blindness and the reason that Jesus, the perfect "God/Man" had to come to pay a price we couldn't pay.

In our fallen condition only Jesus could restore the breach or chasm between us and the God who is Holy. It's hard for me to understand why he would do it, but we can see that what was done on our behalf was done intentionally. In our Epistle reading from Philippians 2:6–8,

Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Essentially, God was willing to come to us in human form and dwell in our midst, put up with our arrogant, selfish and foolish nature, and die for us. For those of us who have been Christians a long time, we are accustomed to hearing certain passages read during this time of year. We have learned to identify those passages of scripture, Psalms or prophecies that are Messianic in their reference. It serves as a reminder that we can see the history of redemption unfolding and moving ever forward toward the day when Jesus will return, and all things will be made new. But the concern is

— does this familiarity with these scriptures and their themes still move our hearts and bring us to our knees in repentance and praise?

We read together [Psalm 22](#) this morning and from the first verse we are reminded of the words of Jesus on the cross as he experienced the wrath of the Father poured out upon him because of our sin. It's sobering to consider but is nothing like what it meant to Jesus when He read those words knowing they referred to him.

Consider Psalm 22:1, 7–8, 10–11,

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

⁷All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

⁸He trusts In the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!

¹⁰On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help."

It's the cry of agony, of someone bereft of all hope and Jesus was willing to go through this moment that you and I could not begin to comprehend. Why? Because this was the only way that we could escape an eternity of this type of agony, where there is "no God." That is the description of Hell, and he was willing to go there so that we could avoid it. Even though we can understand that Hell is a place that we wouldn't want to go to, I don't believe that we can have any sense of what it would be like. It's a place where God removes his saving presence entirely, for eternity. No hope of any relief, just the eternal wrath of God on those who have rejected him.

We have never experienced that and when we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we never will have to. In speaking to others about their need for Christ and the penalty of rejecting God's free gift, some have said to me that they have already experienced Hell on earth. Clearly, they had experienced some terrible tragedies but the worst situations on earth do not compare to an eternity of "no God."

Today we can merely turn on the news or go online to a steady diet of many stories where people have turned from godly virtue and embraced a level of evil that is startling. Right now we read of war in Ukraine with Russia and the possibility of war breaking out in other places around the world.

It's madness and leaves many without any hope for the future. In our own country we are seeing many of those in leadership resisting the very law of God that was the foundation of our country and insisting that those who love God's word and teach that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation are bigots, fascists, and could be guilty of hate speech. In his book, *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis wrote,

The descent to hell is easy and those who begin by worshipping power, soon worship evil.

Jesus was in a remarkably similar situation when he entered into the city of Jerusalem. The religious leaders who should have welcomed him, instead saw him as a threat to their authority and rule over the people of Israel.

Leading up to Jesus' entry back into Jerusalem tensions had been growing between him and the religious leaders, who had made it known that they intended to kill him. This is an extremely dramatic scene. By openly entering the city where he was a marked man, Jesus took the first step

toward the final confrontation. Again, it was an intentional move, and he knew there was to be no turning back.

Passover was one of the three major feasts that Jews were supposed to attend in Jerusalem, and consequently, the population of Jerusalem swelled enormously at this time. The city was packed not only with those who had come from all over to attend this feast, but also those who had come to see what Jesus would do.

There was a sense that a showdown was imminent. As this great crowd was beginning to gather from around Israel—and even the larger world of those who lived away from Jerusalem—news about Jesus was spreading and for many there was a feeling of hope that maybe, finally, the Messiah had come. This was the King, the royal Son of David that they had longed for.

The fact that they chose to welcome Jesus by waving palm branches reveals a lot about what it was that they were expecting from him. This had all the elements of a patriotic parade. Palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism since the time of the Maccabees. F. F. Bruce in his commentary wrote,

From the time of the Maccabees palms or palm branches had been used as a national symbol. They had figured in the procession which celebrated the rededication of the temple in 164 BC (2 Maccabees 10:7) and again when winning the full political independence was celebrated under Simon in 141 BC. Later palms appeared as national symbols on the coins struck by the Judean insurgents during the first and second revolts against Rome (AD 66–70 and 132–135).

Jesus would be the King like no other before Him and would rule over all that He had created, His vision not being limited to Israel, something they couldn't comprehend. Jesus knew the prophets and the role he was to play, but at the time he was the only one who did. John 12:16 recounts,

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

If Jesus had settled for the throne of David in Jerusalem the real issue of mankind's bondage to sin and death would never have been dealt with and the kingdom of Satan would have remained in power and authority over the earth. At the time of his entry into Jerusalem, only Jesus fully understood what was at stake and that only he could do what was necessary to overcome the kingdom of darkness.

It was no coincidence that Jesus chose Passover to enter Jerusalem. Flavius Josephus, the 1st-century Roman-Jewish historian, wrote that one year a census was taken of the number of lambs slain for Passover and that figure was 256,500. Jesus entered Jerusalem walking in the midst of lambs who were destined for sacrifice during the celebration, and as he walked, he alone knew that they were a symbol of what he had come to be: John 1:29, "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"

Jesus was the living reality of what the sacrificial lambs pointed to—a sacrificial atonement that would be made once and for all. He knew what the scriptures foretold about the Messiah and was under no illusion that it would be easy. Scriptures like Isaiah 53:6–7 that we read this morning,

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned, everyone, to his own way*

*and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.*

Unfortunately, the truth is that there are many churches that claim to gather to worship God but deny the divinity and authority of Jesus Christ alone, and as a consequence, they are merely celebrations of death. When he came into Jerusalem, they welcomed him as their new King, but when he went to the cross to pay the price for our sins, He did the kingliest thing that he could do, he laid down his life for his subjects.

As we consider all that is happening in our country and around the world it's a reminder that we are far from being through telling this story. Jesus won the victory over sin and death, but the battle for souls still rages. The only hope for our community, our state, our country and the world is Jesus Christ, and he has commanded "his body" to deliver the message of the cross to those around them, even if it comes at a great cost.

The task before us is to live into the victory that Jesus won and in His glorious name enter the fight that rages on all around us. Signs of the kingdom of darkness are all around. We don't have to look very far but can see the evidence and can read about it daily in the news. The task before us is to be living witnesses to the love and power of Christ to those around us and to be continually praying that God would use us in the lives of those in our community. Let's pray.

Lord, raise us up as faithful servants and use us more fully than ever before. As we move this week towards the celebration of the resurrection next Sunday, let our hearts be longing for the resurrection power to move in and through us that you might be glorified and those who are lost might experience the transforming power of Jesus Christ in their lives. For your glory, O Lord, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen!

Let's pray.

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