

Palm Sunday, 4.5.2020

St. Mark's, Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Mt. 21:1-11; Is. 50:4-9; Ps 31; Phil 2:5-11; Mt 27:11-54

“The Suffering Servant”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Thank you for joining me online for worship today. Our Music Director and organist Les is accompanying us today, along with John on cello. Thank you both very much! Each week as long as we need to, we plan to stream Sunday worship live on Facebook from this empty sanctuary. This week we will also stream Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Holy Week services, both at 7 pm.

Today on Palm Sunday we begin the journey of Holy Week. Holy Week is a journey to Jesus' cross and resurrection. Holy Week is a journey that contains joy and sorrow; shouts of “Hosanna!” and shouts of “Crucify him!” Jesus' disciples were tested on this journey: The disciples helped Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, and they abandoned him at the cross.

The journey of Holy Week also includes each of us. We are not passive observers. Even if you are watching this service over the internet, our human journeys take place, not online, but in the everyday. The everyday is not virtual place; the everyday is a place of real sorrow and real joy. The everyday is where Jesus shares our humanity and where Jesus calls us to follow him. The call of Jesus is not virtual. The call of Jesus is very real, because daily Jesus walks with us in the very center of our sorrows and joys. I hope you will find time for moments of prayer this week as we make the journey to Jesus' cross and resurrection.

The Psalmist today reminds us of God's steadfast presence. Psalm 31 reads, “*I have become like a broken vessel. I hear the whispering of many - terror all around! But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God. My times are in your hand.”* These are very timely words for us. Our times are in God's hands. Voices around the world in the media, governments, and societies all talk about and report on the very real terror around us. The Psalmist reminds us to live with hope, “*Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*” Our times are indeed in God's hands. The good news is that we are not alone. As we begin Holy Week we remember that in life and in death we are always in God's hands. In the midst of fear and terror, we keep our eyes firmly focused on the cross and resurrection our Lord.

Today we also remember that we can make a choice about our attitude toward life. Paul reminds

us that we have a choice in our mindset about our human journey. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.”*

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ.” I know this sounds incredible, but the presence of Christ is real! Christ became human so that we can share in the divinity of God; and Christ became a servant so that we are also able to share in his human servanthood for others. To have the mind of Christ means that we need to stay close to Christ. Staying close to Christ means staying near the places where he is fully revealed – in the cross and the resurrection.

On Palm Sunday we remember a holy paradox: Jesus is the King, and Jesus is the Suffering Servant. Jesus is the Servant King. Jesus was greeted with palms as he rode into Jerusalem as King, and Jesus, the Suffering Servant, innocently gave his life for others. Everything about the Holy Week journey to the cross and the resurrection points us to God’s powerlessness and suffering. Only the suffering God can help us. Jesus calls us to participate in his sufferings in the reality of the everyday. In staying close to the cross and resurrection, we allow ourselves to be caught up in Jesus’ ongoing messianic event.

When we allow Christ Jesus to dwell in us we share the same mind that was in him. When Christ the Servant King dwells in us, we are freed to live for others. Christ the Servant King feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, welcomes the stranger, and visits the sick and imprisoned. Christ the Servant King goes to the cross for each of us. Daily, this King invites us to walk with him by walking with our neighbors.

Yet for many people in the world, living for and serving others seems foolish and weak. We live in a world that is often all about “What’s in it for me?” Just as many taunted and ridiculed Jesus at the cross, many in the world continue to deride the idea of a weak God. The idea of a weak and powerless God makes no sense for many. Yet this is the way God chose to be known in the world, because we are weak and suffering people. Christ shares our humanity in the place where we are most human, where we suffer and are weak – the one place we cannot heal ourselves.

When he was crucified, the Suffering Servant cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* The one who loves unconditionally also suffered unconditionally for the world. Jesus became fully human to fully share in our most bitter and forsaken moments of human suffering. In a time of terror and pandemic people may ask, “Where is God?” The answer of Holy Week is that

God is with those who suffer. Only the suffering God is able to help us and turns us toward hope and resurrection.

During Holy Week, we see Jesus giving new meaning to our humanity. Jesus gave his followers a new commandment “love one another as you have been loved by me.” At his last supper Jesus said, “*This is my body given for you,*” and Jesus also washed his disciples’ feet. This week, once again, we encounter the God who serves and loves unconditionally. Those who mocked Jesus on the cross said, “*He saved others; he cannot save himself.*” Here we see why God became human: Jesus didn’t save himself: instead, he gave himself for others. Jesus emptied himself of everything for all humanity. Can you think of anyone around you who can empty themselves completely to love another? During Holy Week Jesus shows us what our humanity is truly capable of. Jesus restores the image of God in each of us. We are made to give and to love.

This week as you walk to Jesus’ cross and resurrection, remember Jesus walks with you. As the world faces terror and pandemic, Jesus walks with you and with this suffering world. As we continue our all too frail human journeys, the One who emptied himself comes to us, saying, “empty yourself” – empty yourself in love for others; in doing so you will become truly alive. In emptying yourself you will be filled with the power of God’s love.

We do not walk alone. Christians around the world in every language and every possible culture are also emptying themselves by walking with Jesus and their neighbor to the cross. Be filled with the grace of Christ’s resurrection, hope and love.

Take the journey of Holy Week to Jesus’s cross and resurrection. Only in dying, only in emptying our selves, do we become filled with God’s power and love for others. Amen.