

# *Sermon Text for April 14, 2019*

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PALM SUNDAY

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Luke 19:29-40

## *“Palms or Passion”*

One of the first things you should notice for today is that we are not reading out of Acts simply because Acts doesn't have Palm Sunday. Every single one of the Gospels has Jesus riding into Jerusalem on this day that we have labeled Palm Sunday. We walked down the road from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, the same road that Jesus and his disciples would have taken on Palm Sunday. It is a narrow road with border walls on either side. It is extremely steep which made it very dangerous when wet.

It wasn't hard to imagine what it would have been like 2,000 years ago. The disciples were in celebration mode. The sermon title is Palms or Passion, describing two life realities with Palms being celebration and passion being the other side of reality which we call suffering. What we will see today is that there is redemption and learning in both celebration and suffering.

I don't think I have preached on the redemptive value of suffering or on the benefits of suffering. The Bible consistently teaches that we ought to boast in sufferings because as Paul tells us that suffering produces endurance. This is not a popular theme because I am a populist and people don't like to think that suffering has any good side to it at all. So, as a result, I guess I skipped this topic.

Everyone has had their share of suffering in their life. When my dad turned 59 I watched him deteriorate from Alzheimer's over the next few years until he went into a vegetative state and died. I have a brother who struggles with mental illness and at times is lost. I have learned from these experiences, but they don't define me. Our sufferings ought to make us stronger but not define us so that we are imprisoned by them.

Thought the celebrations and the sufferings of life, the Palms and the Passion, we often are defined by our highs and our lows in life, but Jesus provides us all that we need to be defined by him and gain our value from our creator calling us good, something we would do well to remember in the midst of the Palms and Passions of life.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Today we read in Isaiah the third of what are considered four suffering servant songs which describe the future Messiah who will be depicted as a sufferer which he underwent at the hands of humanity. As Christians we take great comfort in hearing and believing that our Savior,

our Messiah suffered for our sake so that we could be redeemed, but also in His suffering we can view our suffering as being redemptive as well. Isaiah 42 tells us a bruised reed he will not break, Isaiah 49 tells us “you are my servant, in whom I will be glorified.” Isaiah 50 we just read and Isaiah 52 tells us he was despised and rejected by others, he has borne our infirmities, by his bruises we are healed.

So we begin today in Isaiah and a reminder that in Scripture we see a person willing to take abuse for the sake of the kingdom. There is redeeming value in suffering abuse for the sake of the kingdom. No redemption and no call to suffering abuse at the hands of a spouse or a person who looks to take advantage of our servant spirit. Be careful, there is no imperative to stay with an abuser, do not conflate redemption in suffering for the kingdom and feeling called to stay in a relationship of abuse. Not the same.

So how do we gain redemption or at least understand redeeming value in our suffering for the kingdom? Redemption is knowing that the Lord has suffered as we have in whatever we have gone through. We can make it because our Savior has walked that same path. This is so different than what we normally think. Our goal has always been pleasure or security. If I were to ask you name one thing you would want in life some may say stability and safety. But our goal ought to be the pursuit of the kingdom of God which often may jeopardize our pursuit of pleasure, our security, our stability, our safety.

The more we leave the church doors open for anyone and the more people start to join us on this journey, then the more difficult it will become and maybe the less pleasurable. The less secure this building will become and the more wear and tear it will suffer as hundreds of kids take over Fellowship Hall, and hundreds of new people come into this building for programs and worship. The more open we are to the community and the more we look to serve people who are different from us then the less stable we will be and the more things will be out of our control. Are you okay with that?

We aren't here to make sure things happen as we plan them to happen and make sure they are under our control. Things tend to go better when they are out of our control and guided by the Holy Spirit which blows as it might where it wants. We are here to pursue the kingdom of God who takes orders from no one.

But let's talk about Palm Sunday and the incredibly passive Jesus that we find in Luke. Jesus equips the disciples in vs. 30 by sending them on a mission and equipping them with the words they would need to speak in vs. 31. In vs.32 we read that everything happened exactly as

Jesus said that it would. Remember that, life will happen exactly the way that Jesus tells us it will.

What does Jesus tell us that our life of discipleship will be like? He tells us that blessed are the peacemakers even if they revile you. If you become my disciple, you will not have a place to lay your head. Jesus tells us what it is going to be like being his disciple. We will face a life of passion. We have been saved by Jesus and equipped by Jesus to handle what the world puts in front of us. But for some reason we don't want to embrace the passion which is in front of us, thinking that Jesus must mean that Palms and celebration is really what he wants for us. We tell people if you join us your life will be easier.

I am telling you if you are disciple of Jesus Christ, if you are a member of First Presbyterian then you will suffer. Your life may be more difficult if you join us on this journey. Are you on board? Suffering and passion will be a part of your life. Are you in?

If you join us the pastor isn't going to give you answers, you'll have to figure it out together with us. It part of the journey. You don't get easy answers in life, because there aren't easy answers in life, you have to figure it out. You will be challenged to tithe because Scripture commands it and you may lose your job even as you are obedient. But Jesus gives us what we need for both, the Palms and the Passion of life, for both the celebration and the suffering.

It is interesting because here in Luke we see the disciples are in a season of their life and their discipleship that is palms. Celebration today marks Palm Sunday. But go one verse past what we read and what do you find? Jesus weeps, one verse later in the midst of the Palms the suffering is present.

Palms and Passion, celebration and suffering are part and parcel of all of creation. We are intricately linked with the creation around us and our suffering is linked with creation suffering, our celebration is linked with creation celebration. Think about it. Adam and Eve sin and thorns and thistles are produced. Isaiah describes peace on earth in terms of what will happen in creation, in the animal kingdom, cows and bears graze together, lion and lamb will be side by side.

A star appears for Jesus' birth. The earth shuddered and cracked at his death. The sun was eclipsed while he was on the cross. All life is from God. The whole universe shares together bane and blessing, life and death, palms and passion. If we were silent, of course the stones will cry out. They are part and always have been a part of the story just like we are. Trust that God will get you through your palms and passions. Amen.