

**March 28, 2021 Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday      Mark 11:1-11 (read from the SPARK Story Bible)**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope      Isaiah 50:4-9a, Philippians 2:5-11**  
[Reference to Debie Thomas' blog for this date (posted on 3/21/21) entitled Save Us, We Pray in Journey with Jesus.]

**Dear friends in Christ Jesus, grace and peace, liberation, and justice, to you. Amen**

**This is going to date me, but “when I was a kid”** we didn't link Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday.  
Anybody else have that same recollection?

I've been watching as slowly the church has come to pair these two foundational stories:  
palms and passion.

The service begins with the story of that first Palm Sunday.

If it weren't for a pandemic and the need for such COVID-care,

we'd be gathering on the boulevard,  
leaning in to hear the gospel proclaimed from the church steps,  
processing into the sanctuary, palms in hand.

COVID or not, somewhere right about now in the service, with the readings,  
we make the transition to the passion, to the cross.

In this way, we lay out holy week's journey at the start of the week:

We remind ourselves of the twists and turns,  
the complex politics and strategy and emotion,  
the way that God works liberation, life, in the midst of death, so long ago, and still today.

This morning we hold this same tension:

We began by hearing the Palm Sunday reading from the Spark Story Bible.  
And we'll end our service hearing the stories of Holy Week from voices that span the decades.

**The word Hosanna, means, “Save us.”**

That's what they were crying as they cut the branches and laid their coats on the path for Jesus.  
Save us.

Really, that's what they were praying in their shouts,  
as their fists pumped the air,  
as excitement and hope, expectation and desperation, merged and mingled.

Hosanna. Save us.

**Oh, good God, it's been a year.**

Hosanna might be our best imperative: Save us!

Perhaps more than ever, this year we're aware of the resurrection process,  
the ups and downs, the life and death.

Like it or not, often more quickly than we care to admit,

we teeter between hope and desperation, unable to quite get our footing.

There are moments of possibility, relief—

that first vaccination,

that chance to hug long and hard,

that backyard conversation that feels, finally, a bit more relaxed.

But what I'm noticing is that mingled with the goodness is a new level, or maybe it's just a sustained level,  
of desperation, of isolation, of exhaustion, of grief and anxiety:

"It has just felt heavier," one person said, adding, "and I don't know how to un-heavy it."

That's a sentiment that I've heard time and again, especially in the last couple of weeks

It's a sentiment that I've felt, sensing that my tears have been rising more quickly,

Mindful that there's a grief in my gut—my own grief, and the world's grief.

Maybe my tears come now as a relief for all that's been, and all that hasn't been, I don't know.

**Layer on this** hate speech and violence and micro and macro aggressions  
toward Asian American communities and other BIPOC communities.

Add in mass shootings and struggling neighborhoods,

variants and impossible situations at the Mexican-US border,

the start of the trial and plenty of uncertainty about how it will end

Hosanna. Save us, we cry, save us, God.

**Debie Thomas writes, "If the Palm Sunday story is about *anything*,**

it is about dazzling hopes and disappointed expectations.

It's a story about what happens when the God we want and think we know doesn't show up,

and another God — a less efficient, less aggressive, far less muscular God — shows up instead,

and saves us in ways we didn't know were possible."

**Dear friends, it's been a year.**

All along the way God has been showing up, saving us "in ways we didn't know were possible."

We could grab onto this holy story and insist on understanding.

We could twist it around to try and make it all make sense.

I know that temptation, particularly in anxious times.

**Rather, stop a moment, close your eyes, take a deep breath.**

Let this honest tension of hope and fear,

possibility and despair,

accompany you to the cross.

That's the very best place for it—at the foot of the cross.

Let *your* cry of Hosanna, Save us, find a voice, and listen closely for one another's cry.

Hear the stories, sing the songs, savor the meal,

love and live with all you've got.

And God will meet you, right where you are, making life in places of death.

Saving us "in ways we didn't know were possible."

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God.

Hosanna, Save us.

Amen.