

## **Sermon April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

### *Palm/Passion Sunday*

#### *Jesus Walks through the Storms of Life with us and for us*

As the weather starts to warm up I know we are only a few months away from Thunderstorms and possibly Tornadoes. Now some people love storms. They will stand outside on their decks. Take out their phones and make a video of the storm as the Tornado passes by their yard.

Some people risk their health and their lives to chase these storms. Studying them with the hopes of gaining a greater understanding of how these storms work. Hoping to create protective measures to keep more people safe.

Some people try to ignore the storm, and keep doing what they are doing. Like a golfer who needs to get 18 holes done even as the lightening is striking the tree right behind them.

Then there are some people like myself who at the first crackle of thunder get anxious and scared. Dashing towards a place to hide out until the storm passes.

Like the thunderstorms we face during our summer months, when we face a problem in our lives we may respond to the problem in different ways. For example, some people see a problem and they have to fix it. Doesn't matter what obstacles get in their way. They are determined to get it done. Some people will go and do their research first so they can better understand the problem before attempting a solution. We see this with our scientists and researchers who are trying to figure out all they need to know about the Coronavirus with the hopes of finding a vaccine. We see this with the doctors and nurses who are doing everything they can to get people through this. We see this with our politicians and other leaders who are creating policies to help protect us.

Some people though in their haste to get it fixed will make decisions that end up making the problem worse. One time a family member was trying to fix something on my car. They kept pulling at this cover to get it off until they pulled too hard and broke it.

For some people they see a problem and try to ignore it thinking that if they ignore it long enough the problem will just go away. Like the people who continue to ignore the guidelines and laws set in place to help protect us. Or like a couple who fights over a significant issue and then stops talking to each other for a few days or weeks with the hopes that this time apart will be enough for the problem to go away.

For some people they get really anxious and scared when a problem rears its ugly head. As we face this pandemic our fears and anxieties are overwhelming us. We see the stats. We hit social media and start reading. Unfortunately, we do run into a lot of misinformation that perpetuates our anxieties and fears.

Well, in our gospel readings this morning, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey giving people hope that he has come to liberate them from the oppression they are facing from the Roman Empire. Or in other words, Jesus has come to fix their problems. Saving them from their suffering.

Jesus enters the Temple. Says what he needs to say to challenge the leadership of the day, and then later is arrested. What happened to fixing their problems?

Now Jesus stands before Pilate. The crowds are given a choice to either stand beside Jesus of Nazareth who has come in peace to liberate them. Or they can stand beside Jesus Barabbas who comes with the sword to liberate them.

Of course, the people choose the person who will lead with the sword, because in their perception the sword is a visible action against the oppressors. Barabbas is doing something to fix the problem. While they witness Jesus of Nazareth just standing there in front of Pilate saying or doing nothing to change his fate. Or to change their fate.

I'm not surprised the people are a little disturbed at Jesus' reaction. More often than not we want someone to come and fix our problems. We don't do very well standing in the midst of uncertainty. If Jesus is the messiah he should be equipped with the abilities and tools to take on the Empire and finally liberate God's people. How is Jesus' passive approach going to help? Where is the Jesus who came into Jerusalem with a purpose? Wait a minute. He did come in on a donkey not a steed. Maybe Jesus' purpose is different from ours? Maybe Jesus isn't so obsessed with just fixing everything?

Jesus goes on to face crucifixion. One of the most horrifying ways to be executed in human history. Jesus is mocked and abused. Then is nailed to a cross where he will hang beside two other people who were arrested for their attempt at a violent uprising. Kind of ironic that those who choose to use the sword are hanging right there beside Jesus. Kind of like that driver who speeds ahead of you only to be sitting at the same red light you are at.

Then we hear Jesus scream his last breath while shouting out the words from Psalm 22. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Words that ring true to us today as we try to figure out why this is all happening. Why we are suffering from this pandemic? Why God doesn't just come down and make everything right?

As I reflect on these questions. Questions that I have heard from people over the last couple of weeks. I always come back to the same thought. Jesus trusts that no matter what happens to him God's mission will prevail. God's kingdom has been revealed in all that Jesus has said and done, and is changing the world today, and will continue to change the world for centuries to come. Even if Pilate sends him away to be crucified.

Jesus also believes that his death is not where things will end. Jesus will do something even more miraculous that will inspire his followers to continue risking their lives to reveal God's kingdom in the world. To continue to reflect God's grace and love to the people they encounter.

Jesus trusts in his purpose for humanity. Jesus trusts in the compassion and love of the Creator. Jesus trusts.

When Jesus cries out the words of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm we often see this as a moment of doubt or weakness where he wonders where the Father is. I believe Jesus cries out these words with the intention to show us that Jesus stands with us as we suffer. Jesus now understands these feelings of abandonment we often feel when we face the storms in our lives.

Jesus stands with us, and cries out on our behalf. For his followers the hope of what Jesus was to become is gone. For many he has failed. They are all feeling this forsakenness. If the messiah cannot save us who can?

Well, what we will see on Easter morning is what the Centurion witnesses at Golgotha. God is doing something redeemable through Jesus' death. God is doing something redeemable through Jesus' whole Holy Week journey. God is doing something redeemable throughout Jesus' ministry. God will get the last word in this saga. Not death. Not COVID 19.

What we find as we approach Holy Week and the Easter season is a faith that gives us hope that God is doing something redeemable as we face this mess. Kind of like the scattered followers of Jesus, who come to the tomb hurting and suffering, and yet, leave with a hope that not even death will stop God from loving them.

And so, as we face the problems in our lives including this pandemic. As we find ourselves stuck on the first line of Psalm 22. Crying out to God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As we face this enormous storm in our world. God reassures us in these words and in the coming of Easter that Jesus is walking through this storm with us and for us. Jesus is taking the lead and will face the powers that oppress us. Will face death on the cross so we can feel God's empathy in our suffering. So, we can bear witness to the empty tomb on Easter morning. Empowering us to declare the

words at the end of this same Psalm. “They shall proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying to them “The Lord has acted!””

We are invited to trust in these redeeming words as Jesus trusts in God’s redeeming love as he stands before Pilate. As he hangs from the cross. We are invited to trust that even though we are living through a long and violent storm that most of us have never seen. God will give us what we need to endure. God will give us the tools we need to keep being the church in this uncertain world. God will redeem us from our suffering, and breath on us new life. Moving us to declare, as the centurion declared at the feet of Jesus, “Truly this person was God’s Son!”

**Let us pray**, loving God, open our hearts to trust in your Son who came and suffered with us. Who gave up his life so we can bear witness to your unconditional love in the resurrection. So, we can see that not even illness or death will separate us from this love. Empower us through faith to be like your disciples finding a way to continue being your hands and feet in our hurting world. Giving people hope in your redeeming love.

**Amen.**

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