

**March 25, 2018**  
**A Sermon for Palm Sunday**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**Mark 11:1-11**

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the eleventh chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’ ” <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

“She didn’t know what she was walking into...” “He never saw it coming...”  
“They were hit from out of left field...”

We have so many turns of phrase for the experience of the unexpected. We humans are creatures who tend to draw our worlds large enough to be exciting...but still small enough not to be too frightening...smaller than the true vastness and uncertainty of the universe through which we tumble.

Some of us grow up without the privilege of holding those illusions very much, if at all...and the world is always indescribably vast and indifferent...if not outright hostile.

But to the extent that we each harbor this comforting imagination of safety...sometimes the illusions that keep us comfortable come crashing down around us.

Our gently drawn worlds become fractured. For many of us, new cracks have formed in the past weeks...and even years and decades...than we ever saw before. These past weeks most of us have probably felt more deeply what many others in this world feel often...that our homes, the roads we travel, the stores whose doorways we cross...can transform from places of comfort to places of danger...just like that.

Before we can notice that the world isn't what we think...it swerves and leaves us reeling.

Some of us already go through life braced for it. The swerve. The crash. The explosion. The threat. On guard everywhere...coiled like a compressed spring.

The bomber who terrorized our city did that to us.

There are others who have turned our places of learning...not to mention theaters and festivals and clubs...and churches...into shooting ranges...who have torn beautiful lives from this earth and from the ones who so loved them.

And we cry out. At the pain from which we cannot...or will not...find a road away.

This cry is known to us. It is painfully familiar, even though the pain itself almost always manages to surprise us. This cry is so well known we have made it a part of our worship...It is a presumed lament...a surprise for which we have planned. Premeditated grief. "Kyrie, eleison"...we say... "Lord...have mercy."

We are so sure we will need to say it, we can plan it in advance.

I have noticed that, for a time, we received new prayer requests at almost every shooting (at least the ones that were close or made the news), every act of terror...and I don't know if something changed...it might have been me...or maybe we got tired...or it became too tender...a repetitive stress injury to our spirits. Maybe we lost the passion to grieve in particular each time...I don't know. I don't think it was wrong or anything. It just...was...but eventually, we just put in a standing prayer request in the list in the Messenger for the victims of the violence that never seems to end. Maybe you noticed. We realized the need for this prayer wasn't going away any time soon.

We also gathered in person to pray after some of these tragedies. We lit candles and read the names of the dead. But then it seemed so hard to decide which tragedies we would gather and mourn...which names would we say out loud?

So now...sort of like our standing prayer petition for the victims of violence...we will begin to gather to pray the first Sunday evening of every month...beginning next week...yes, Easter...because even in the hope and joy of resurrection, we know new pain and suffering will come into the world...there will be new cries to raise to God.

Today, the crowd cries out to Jesus, not in the Greek of "Kyrie, Eleison," but from the Hebrew... "Hosanna!" We often treat it like a cry of triumph or praise...but it is actually another way to say... "Have mercy." That is what the word really means. The people cry out for mercy into the highest heaven...

Jesus entered the city to a crowd of people who had come to know full well that their world was not safe...that their lives weren't held precious...at least not by the ones who seemed to have the most power over them.

So, while Pontius Pilate and his phalanx of war horses and chariots marched in from one side of the city...a poor carpenter on a donkey marched in from the other. And the people came to him... looking for someone who didn't think of their lives as dispensable...or as something to be exploited. They came to Jesus looking for mercy in a merciless world...

The sacred days we enter now as Holy Week begins will lay bare, again, just how merciless this world can be...and how much God will do to forge a different way...a merciful way...a humble way...a loving way...even to the point of humiliating death.

The world will show no mercy. And yet, Jesus will not wield the power of the universe to punish and overthrow the heartless violence...at least not in the way anyone would expect. Because even when we know what's coming...it hits us out of left field all over again...what the way of mercy, love, and humility look like.

Today, we cry out, "Hosanna! Have mercy!" And as we journey through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil of Easter...we will hear and see and taste and touch Christ's answer to our cry. We will see love poured out as the Lord of the Universe bends down to wash our feet...as he breaks bread with his friends and tells them to remember him...as he accepts the cross as the world's cruel welcome to their Creator...and makes it the place of his glory...because his love will transform the cross, the place of humiliation and death, into a throne, the source of love and life. And then we will come to the vigil at his tomb...to the story of God's love and liberation and answer to our cry throughout time, "Have mercy, Lord... Kyrie, eleison... Hosanna, Son of David..." And we will hear God's answer again.

Precious children of God, may the road of Holy Week show you the truth... the truth of the depth of suffering... and the truth of a God whose love is even deeper still.

Thanks be to God. Amen.