

Advent Columbia Heights: Palm Sunday

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Preacher: Bishop Steve Breedlove

[0 : 00] As I mentioned before, it really is a joy for me to be with you. This church is very special and has a big impact in our diocese. I'm so grateful for Tommy and Dan and how much leadership they provide.

Deborah has stepped up to the plate and served us in our synod gatherings. Thanks be to God for Elizabeth and Jane. Now we have a new deacon, Amy Atchison, from among you, so praise God for that.

And I imagine a few of you may have been there this morning. If you were there, you heard me mention that Palm Sunday in Anglican churches is a bit of a challenge liturgically.

You might have already picked that up because we have this massive 90-degree turn that has, you know, we take it full speed in the middle of the service. So we come in with all the joy and the celebration and the palms and the kids get to laugh and, you know, act like kids.

And the adults got to act like kids and it's really fun. All that kind of stuff. And we're recapitulating the events of the original Palm Sunday. And usually there's a Palm Sunday reading from the gospel, which we heard tonight from Luke chapter 19.

[1 : 06] And some celebratory songs about Jesus, usually with the word Hosanna, which again, Dan, thanks a lot. We did that. Hosanna in the highest. And then there's a sermon.

And it may also speak about Palm Sunday. But at the same time, somewhere along the way, what happens is exactly what happened. And when Tommy read the gospel tonight, we take this sharp 90-degree turn.

We don't even pause. And we just turn a different direction. And suddenly we are reading about the passion of Jesus Christ. So the theme goes from the Hosannas of Palm Sunday to the somber and, in a sense, dark theme of rejection with which we enter into Passion Week.

We try to bring this all together in this one worship service today. I've made the decision in the sermon today to take that hard 90-degree turn toward Passion Week.

And really focus on that last evening at the Last Supper in the Garden of Gethsemane. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me because I'm actually going to go back beyond what Tommy read in Luke chapter 22.

[2 : 17] Take out your phones if you need to. Turn to Luke 22. Just turn off that little ringer-dinger thing. Make sure that it's silent. Luke is interesting in his recounting of this event because he includes some distinctive elements that are not in the other gospels.

And I'm actually going to mention those sort of in like a drive-by sighting of these three events. And just even comment on them. Because as you prepare your hearts for Passion Week, there is much fodder in this passage for your own soul.

And the things that I mention, even in passing, might be something that God wants to speak to you. And I encourage you to take some time this week in Luke chapter 22 and just sort of sit with this text.

But having mentioned three things in passing, I'm going to actually drive up and park by three others. And spend a little bit more time. So somewhere in here, I hope that you have the opportunity to reflect on some things and begin to prepare your own hearts.

In terms of some things I just want to mention to you and call it to your attention. One of them is the argument amongst the disciples about who is the greatest. About halfway through in Luke chapter 22 verse 24.

[3 : 29] It's just amazing to think about this because Jesus has just washed the disciples' feet. He has told them, I've shown you what to do. He says, the disciple is not above his master.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. And in fact, what I'm doing by this is telling you how to serve one another. And then within a few minutes, they're arguing about one another, about which of them is the greatest. And surely if the name of the game in town is to wash each other's feet, maybe they're thinking, well, the fact that you washed my feet before yours makes me more important than you.

And the disciples seem to come back to this time and time again. Luke is the only one who inserts this conversation at this point. Matthew and Mark talk about this earlier. But my guess is this happened a lot.

Because the disciples were constantly in the game of comparing themselves to one another. Sort of like we do, right? And Jesus gets them, in a sense holds their face and says, this is not the way it's supposed to be among you.

And remember this, I am among you as one who serves. That was really the theme of our message this morning. And I just want to repeat it, I am among you as one who serves. And I would encourage you just, if nothing else this week, just to memorize that one phrase.

[4 : 47] It's from the lips of Jesus, I am among you as one who serves. And just keep thinking about that and pondering about what that might mean. Another thing that Luke mentions that is distinctive is he mentions the way that Jesus says to Peter, Satan has demanded to have you to sift you like wheat.

And this incredible assurance that says, but I have prayed for you. And some of you may need to know that when Satan sifts you and, in a sense, blows you up, just to remember that Jesus is praying for you.

And there are times in our lives when we desperately need to keep that in mind. I certainly have. There's another text that the other disciples don't mention, the other gospel evangelists don't mention, when he describes their future ministry and tells them, I told you before not to take anything with you, now I'm telling you to take something with you.

And you can kind of reflect on that. So these are three things that I just mentioned by way of passing that you might reflect on. But I'm going to spend more time on three other aspects of this evening, because these are ones that have really grabbed my attention and grabbed my heart. One of them goes all the way back to verse 14. So again, Luke 22, 14, At the beginning of the institution of the Lord's Supper, according to Luke, Luke includes something that's a little bit different than what the other gospels say.

[6 : 11] And when the hour came, he reclined at the table and the apostles with him. And he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

I'm not sure you've ever thought about that. But Jesus sitting there and saying to his friends, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you. Why was that true? What was his earnest desire? He wasn't talking about it in some sort of formal, like, I need to do this because I need to get on past this to do the next thing. You know, in other words, I'm anxious to get to the end and let me get this one over with.

No, in fact, it's different. This is a three or four hour meal. And he's saying, I have earnestly desired to be with you on the eve of my death.

When Jesus would face all of hell's power alone on the cross, he had an incredible longing to be with his friends. And that's echoed in the many acts of friendship that are outlined in the rest of this chapter and, in fact, in other texts as well.

[7 : 17] Because, again, go back to what I've said to you. As they're arguing with one another, he says, I'm among you as one who serves. Let me keep reminding you of the truth as a friend does. I'm not disgusted with you.

I'm not done with you. When Peter is going to deny him, he says, I'm praying for you. When he goes to the garden, he says, would you please come with me and pray with me?

And those are just some hints of it. If you go to John, it's mind-blowing. In John chapter 14, after John chapter 13, when he's washed their feet, in John chapter 14, he says, I'm going to prepare a place for you and I'm going to come back and get you.

Because I want to be with you forever. And he says, when I go away, I'm going to send my own spirit to be among you because I do not want to leave you alone. In fact, it's better for you that I go because the spirit's going to come.

But think of the assurance he's giving them. In John chapter 15, it gets even more profound. He says, abide in me. Share your very life.

[8 : 18] Share my life with you. Be as deeply connected as a vine is to the branch. Be wed to me. And then later on in John chapter 15, that incredible statement, no longer do I call you servants, but I call you what? Friends. And what I want you to hear in all this, brothers and sisters, is this amazing concept that Jesus Christ calls us friends and desires a friendship with us. And I don't know how that strikes you, but it strikes me as incredible. Well, I can hardly believe it. When I walk my way through life, I most of the time think of Jesus in other ways. I think of him as someone as an example to follow or a teacher or, of course, my Lord and my Savior. I think of him as somebody that I must honor, that I must obey. All of that's true. But as Jesus moves toward the end of his earthly life, he emphasizes time and time again, you're my friends. And he spends three or four hours in a meal together with his friends.

[9 : 34] And all of the images of being around the table with friends should crowd into our souls and help us to realize how Jesus sees us, how he relates to us, how he connects with us.

And I hope you might be able to think about times in your own life when you particularly wanted to be with your friends. And for Jesus, this was the night before his agony. And he wanted to be with somebody that he was comfortable with and that he was friends with. I remember years ago, we raised our family in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. And it was just one of those moments in time. We were there for several years and ministered in a church. And it was one of those moments in time when I can say that we genuinely had a large number of friends in the church.

And over the course of the years, there were just a bunch of guys. We did a lot of incredible things to do, you know, running the rapids and the Saskatchewan River and mountain climbing together and all sorts of things that we did together that were an awful lot of fun together. We had just time and time again a bunch of guys, 12, 15, 20 of us, that would do things together. And there was a lot of friendships there. Well, as we were moving, one of my friends, Dave Weber, said, let's spend a day together.

[10 : 49] Let me get some of the guys together and let's spend a day. So we spent an entire day together hiking one of the most beautiful mountains in the Kananaskis Valley that I love, where you get up on the top and you can see the whole valley laid out before you, 20 miles in either direction, just this vast, beautiful wilderness.

When we got to the top, Dave had gone there the day before. I didn't know that. And he had hidden a chalice and a patent, bread and wine, and a cloth. And he had arranged our meeting place where there was this flat rock as a table.

And he spread the cloth out before us. And he had put together a cross of sticks. And he'd woven it together. And he put a cross behind the table. And he laid out communion elements. And there were about 18 or 20 of us that had hiked up there and spent the day together hiking. And it was about two days before we were leaving. And we just sat around the table and we shared communion. And then we came down from the mountain and we went to a local tavern. And we shared some other food and drink, as you can imagine. But it was a wonderful, wonderful time. It was bittersweet for us. But it's amazing for me to think that in very similar ways, that's an echo of Jesus' comments to his disciples.

[12 : 04] And I believe from that an echo of his comments to you and me. I desire to be your friend. I desire for you to have the trust and the comfort and the peace and ease with me of a friendship.

The second place I want to pause for just a minute is over in verse 42. This is in the Garden of Gethsemane. And we are listening to Jesus' prayer.

And Jesus knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

During Holy Week, two years ago, I was praying through this passage. Thinking it through. Just sort of sitting with it in my prayers.

And for the first time, something hit me like a brick in the head. And you may have already seen this long ago. It was new to me. And as I sat with this, I began to think about this particular garden scene.

[13 : 16] And I began to contrast it in my mind with another garden scene. With a man who wrestled with obedience and submission to God. And in that other garden scene, he wrestled.

In the end, he said, Not thy will, but mine be done. And then generations and centuries and millennia later, this man was wrestling in a garden with obedience and submission to God.

And he said, Not my will, but thine be done. What flowed from one garden, the light was snuffed out and darkness exploded.

There was the birth of death spiritually. The reign of sin, alienation and conflict, bloodshed that cried out for justice.

There was the destruction of the icon of God, the image of God and man. When God created humanity, male and female, he created male and female as the image bearers of God.

[14 : 32] The icon is literally in the Greek language. And we think of an icon often as a flat image, sort of a picture that can remind us of God. But that's not the concept of an icon, even in Eastern Orthodox theology.

But it's certainly not the icon or the concept of an icon in Scripture. Because as we wrestle with what is an icon or an image of God, we find out that Jesus is the icon, the image of God.

He is literally the insertion of the presence of God in the material world. He's an intrusion from the spiritual reality into the material world.

And when we were created, we were meant to be exactly that. So that as people, male and female, that we together intrude the presence of God into the material world.

And when Adam sinned, that was cut off. And so suddenly the world lost that sense, that sacramental presence of God through male and female.

[15 : 32] Now, not completely, not without recovery. But nevertheless, what a dramatic scene. And we see from that first garden, what flowed from that was degeneration.

The second garden, in contrast, what was birthed in this moment when Jesus said, not my will, but thine be done, was then the darkness began to die and the light began to rain.

The death of death began. Not the birth of death, but the death of death. Instead of the reign of sin, there was the defeat of sin, the reign of grace and righteousness.

Instead of alienation and conflict, there was peace and reconciliation. Instead of bloodshed that cried for justice, there was bloodshed that satisfied justice. Instead of the destruction of the icon, there was the restoration of the icon.

So that literally, those who are in Christ are being remade into the image of God through Jesus Christ. Instead of the departure of the Spirit, there is the restoration and the invasion of the Holy Spirit.

[16 : 45] Jesus says that. I send you my Spirit. Instead of degeneration, there is transformation.

The Scriptures talk of two Adams, does it not? In Romans chapter 5, Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Death reigned from Adam to Moses. Even those who were sinning were not like the transgression of Adam. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

The free gift is not like the result of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

You could go on and on and on. What Adam did in the garden when he refused the will of God is to produce sin and condemnation that seems endless, like an explosion, a never-ending river.

But what happens in this garden when Jesus submits to the Father's will is that one grace literally sucks all of that condemnation unto itself and satisfies it on the cross.

[18 : 01] And now the free gift of righteousness reigns. Do you see what we are learning? We battle God's will in our lives.

At least I do. Am I the only one? If I ask you what are you struggling with in terms of submission to God, and you're honest, probably everybody in this room could come up with something. There's something that we're wrestling with.

Something that we know that the Lord is saying, will you do this? Will you do this? I've struggled in the last few weeks over some details, some issues between me and Sally, thinking about what we're going to do this summer as we are on our sabbatical.

Sounds like no big deal, right? But I've really had a hard time letting go to the obvious, that I need to give up my plans in favor of reality, something God is calling me to do.

I've struggled in my own Lenten practices with submitting to the fasts that God has called me to. But what Jesus tells us is what happens when we submit to the will of God and what life can flow from

that.

[19 : 11] Jesus, as a man, had enormous, infinite authority. When he spoke, people knew that he was speaking the truth. When he operated, he gave away life and love and compassion.

Where did that authority come from? Read the text, Hebrews 5. He learned obedience as a son. He learned how to obey.

He learned how to submit. We see Jesus inviting us to friendship. We see Jesus giving us an example of obedience and submission.

And my third observation by way of encouragement, as you go into this week, is in verse 53. When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me, but this is your hour and the power of darkness.

Luke's the only one who brings that one in. This is the hour of your darkness. The hour you've been given. Indeed, it will be.

[20 : 16] Will it not? As Jesus is arrested, what will be unfolded in the next 12 to 24 hours is hatred and violence and injustice and cruelty and mockery and betrayal, desertion, pain, dereliction, exposure, shame, guilt, separation, loss, and confusion.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It will be a dark time when all the forces of evil will be unleashed. We will see Satan unmasked in his full, horrible glory.

We will see hatred. But, and this is my point, Jesus said this is your what? Hour.

Hour. This is your hour. In the psalm, we read, this is the day the Lord has made.

The eternal day, the everlasting day. On the other side of the hour, there is the day that the Lord has made, and it's a never-ending day. And so even though we want to rush past this weekend to Easter, we cannot help but go through this week thinking of Easter.

[21 : 39] Can we not? The darkness will be dark. But life conquers death. So again, I want to bring this home.

As we hear Jesus saying, I want to be your friend, I want you to imagine him saying that to you in your loneliness, in your shame. As we see Jesus saying, not my will, but thine be thine, I want him to be our example and to befriend us in our own struggles with submission.

But as we struggle with darkness, and as we find ourselves overwhelmed by the sense of, well, the words that come to us, right? The images that come to us that say, there's no hope.

It'll never be, it'll never be any different. I mean, I have a person that I dearly love that I talk to frequently. And his mantra is, it will never change. It will never change.

It will never change. I will always be the failure I am. I will always be the failure I am. And he's a believer. He's a follower of Jesus, but he can't get his head around it.

[22 : 45] And all I can say is, in my home prayers, it's an hour. It's one hour. And there's an eternal day on the other side of this. And it will end.

And so I encourage you, as you enter into this week, I want you to experience the fact that the darkness is an hour.

And experience the fact that the day is forever. Hallelujah. Amen. Three lessons. Please meditate on these.

Meditate on Jesus as your friend. Meditate on the beauty and the life that comes from obedience and submission to the Father. Father, meditate on the fact that the hour of darkness will be followed by never-ending day.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.