

WINNING MANY WARS,  
PALM SUNDAY JOURNEY TO JESUS PASSION

Sermon material compiled by The Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Bayfield for  
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There are many wars to be fought in life. On Palm Sunday Jesus tried to show the people that God is in charge of life and will win these wars.

However, Jesus has repeatedly told his followers that he must go to Jerusalem where he will undergo painful -suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed and rise again.

This is an important trip for Jesus. He is the long awaited Messiah who will bring God's loving righteousness and eternal life to humankind. The accounts of Jesus entry into Jerusalem are told in all four Gospels. The triumphant entrance into Jerusalem is celebrated as the crowds shout "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" The crowds throw palms at Jesus feet as they praise Him. He rides humbly on in majesty. Jesus is a king in a royal procession- however, he comes not to conquer but to bring peace. Here is marked the beginning of a journey that will change the world forever. But this moment of triumph ends quickly as Jesus moves to His *Passion* and the cries of "Hosanna!" become "*Crucify him!*"

We celebrate Jesus triumphal ride as we worship in the *vLiturgy of the Passion*. Readings are from the Old Testament and the Epistle that set the stage for our relating to the *Passion* itself. The *Servant Song of Third Isaiah* (50:8-9) is later associated with Jesus *Passion*. His suffering tells how the Servant obedient to God the Father's direction endures insults and abuse. However, He will go on, knowing that the *Lord* will be with him. (Mtt.21:8-11).

St. Paul in today's Epistle to the *Philippians* (2:5-11) tells us what God is doing here. He gives us an overview of the incarnation of God in Jesus. Paul declares that Jesus, the Son of Man, who was in reality the *Son of God in Man*, at that time decided not "to be grasping," to be equal on a higher plane with *God the Father*. Rather, Jesus emptied Himself of the divine "Son of God" part within Him. He becomes solely human like all of us! He will suffer like all of us, who at times are hurting in life. However, there is still left that little spark of God that remains in Him. "It is the still small voice"<sup>1</sup> of inner direction and conscience that is in every person. That still small voice directs us through every decision we face in the wars of life. Jesus is now like every man and woman that ever lived or will live. Jesus makes God known to us by taking on our humanity.

Eventually, God will greatly exalt Jesus and all the world will acknowledge Him as Lord.<sup>2</sup> God is in charge of life, but first He must make the trip into Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the religious people, and die.

David Kirk, British theologian, describes Jesus' journey; "The entrance into Jerusalem has all the elements of the theatre of the absurd: the poor king; truth comes riding on a donkey; symbolic actions - even parading without a permit! Also, when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem," what was involved was direct action, an open confrontation and a public demonstration of the ... incompatibility of evil with the Kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *I Kings: 19:12*

<sup>2</sup> Franck, Paula, M.T.S.; *Synthesis, YR.A; Palm Sunday Scripture*, PNMSI Pub.Co., Boyds MD April 17, 2011, pg. 1

<sup>3</sup> Kirk, David; *Quotations from Chairman Jesus*; Penguin Press, 1982

Palestinian Jewry had been praying for a human king who would wield the kind of political/military power that would “restore the kingdom to Israel. From the *Psalms of Solomon* and *The Eighteen Benedictions*, we are told the Messiah-King would fit the following description: 1) He would be a descendant of David; 2) He would be anointed by the Lord God; 3) His might would “shatter the unrighteous rulers”; 4) He would destroy the “godless” nations; 5) He would use his “rod of iron” to instill the “fear of the Lord” into all people, “while doing the works of righteousness.”<sup>4</sup>

Reviewing this fifth characteristic of this traditional view of the Messiah, it is noteworthy that Jesus who is the true Messiah, never used a “rod of iron” to compel people to do anything, certainly not righteousness. Righteousness is the situation in which people are brought closer to God. Righteousness is at war with sin, which is the condition that separates people from God. Recognizing this war between Righteousness and sin is most important for anyone in understanding the Christian faith. It is the war between good and bad. It is the two sides in the eternal war within all people. It is in all of us and has been going on from the start of creation. We are human and humankind was made that way.

An example of that war was in a young boy, eleven years old, who had the conflict going on within him. He became terribly ill with a disease about which the doctors were uncertain. It showed signs of a combination of polio and rheumatic, or scarlet fever. The child was suffering in terrible pain. There was one day that it was so bad, he did not care whether he lived or died.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Kirk, David

His mother comforted him. She was with him every day during the several months of his stay in the hospital. His father, could rarely visit his son during his illness, but he wrote letters to the boy. It was the time of World War II. In one letter, the boy's Dad described a war that was going on within the boy's body between the "bad sick cells" that were attacking the "good get well cells". The good cells had to defeat the bad cells, and when they did, the boy would again be healthy. The boy got well, but he never forgot his Dad's loving letter about the war within him.

Years later, the boy went to Seminary; that man remembered the war that had been fighting in his body as a youth, between the "good get well cells" and the "bad sick cells." He learned to relate his youthful war of sickness to St. Paul's description of the ongoing war in every person's relationship with God. People are always struggling between Righteousness and sin, closeness and separation from God.

*Passion Sunday* is about Jesus war of suffering and dying. Today, people at home and around the world are facing death from the dreaded *coronavirus* that causes the disease Covoid 19. It has been declared a war. Thousands of people in the United States and around the world have died from this fearful virus. All of us are aware of this deadly disease for which, so far there is no known cure. It is natural to be afraid. Fear is always of the unknown. But Jesus Christ who returned from the dead has conquered the unknown. He has told us there is nothing to fear in the Kingdom of God. Someday, scientists will find a cure for this disease.

The terror of dying has to do with leaving everything we have known and everyone we love. We have no idea what awaits us. This is true of no

other reality. In his time, Jesus was greatly distressed and troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane. Love leads us to want the other to be, and here we are not. It seems to cancel everything that we sense in a primordial way should be. Instead of reconciling us to this, Christianity agrees with that primordial sense. The world should not be a place of suffering and death; yet it is. St. Paul writes “Death spread to all because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Paul did not mean, all people are primarily bad, but everyone in sin is separated from God.

We can distract ourselves from the tragedy of our condition, which is the agenda of our entire life and culture; or we can try to detach ourselves from it philosophically. But instead of detaching us from the suffering that contradicts our sense of the way the world should be, Christianity shows us that the love which calls us into existence and being, was shown most completely- as flesh nailed to wood!<sup>5</sup> Jesus concludes His *Passion* with His death on the cross on Good Friday.

Martin Luther, a great theologian and reformer wrote; *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*.<sup>6</sup> “You must look at sin only within the picture of grace. The picture of grace is nothing else but that of Christ on the cross and all his dear saints. Grace and mercy are there where Christ on the cross takes your sin from you, bears it for you, and destroys it...It means to view the picture of Christ and to engrave it in yourself. Sins are never sins, for they are overcome and swallowed up in Christ. He takes your death upon Himself and strangles it so that it may not harm you. Believe, that He does it for you. See your death in Him, and not in yourself. Likewise, He takes

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<sup>5</sup> Garvey, John; *America*, February 28, 1997

<sup>6</sup> Luther, Martin: *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, 1519; *LW* 42, pgs. 104-106

your sins upon Himself, overcomes them with His righteousness out of sheer mercy. If you believe that, your sins will never work harm in you.”<sup>7</sup>

The great Swiss psychiatrist, Gustave Jung(sp.?) was asked, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ’s resurrection? He answered, “Do I believe, you ask me? Believe? I know! I know!”<sup>8</sup>

So then, gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ...Never, therefore, let this be erased from your vision, Seek yourself only in Christ and not in yourself and you will find yourself in Him forever.”

While wars will continue to go on in life. Jesus was not out to set up some kind of “Taliban” regime in Israel. He called for the conversion of the human heart and to the end would maintain that the Kingdom of God was “in this world, but not of this world.” By faith alone can God’s Kingdom come for all of us, “on earth as it is in heaven.” AMEN.

Keep the faith. Jesus loves you and so do I. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God be always with you. *AMEN.*

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant: Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, *AMEN.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid. Luther, Martin; cf. above*

<sup>8</sup> Witnessed by the author, RWB that he heard the discussion on a television program years ago. The saying of Jung he remembers, but he has forgotten the time, date and station.

<sup>9</sup> *Prayer Book;The Church Hymnal Corp.,1979, pg.503*