

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Palm Sunday - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Mark 11:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

John 14:1-31

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

1Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going." 5Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

8Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the

Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. 12Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. 15If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." 22Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

25I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28You heard me

say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. 30I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; 31but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Let us pray,

Amen.

Palm Sunday

Good morning. I picked the Gospel lessons for today months ago. The church has shifted from celebrating Palm Sunday to doing something they call “Passion Sunday.” The logic is sound, a great deal of the congregation misses the services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and so they miss a key piece of the story. So they tell that story the Sunday before Easter. I decided to buck that trend, and picked the gospel we have before us today. My argument was that the processional gospel would help set the stage for Palm Sunday and then the section from John would allow us to shape our understanding of what it means to be a community in light of

our expectations on what a Messiah should be. We could then give Maundy Thursday the focus on service in leadership and Good Friday the focus of the cross.

But then Wednesday happened, and Linda Pearson died. The sermon shifted in focus dramatically. Instead of me preaching about Messianic expectations and our failure to truly understand Jesus' mission, the focus became pastoral care. It was then that other parts of the text came to focus, parts like:

1Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

And then I read a little further.

I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

And

18I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

And also,

27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Those are good words. You can take those words to the bank. But then I read another piece:

15If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever... 21They who have my commandments

and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Now, as they say in Seminary, “that’ll preach!” When thinking about how to reflect on the ministry of Jesus Christ and the death of a beloved member, those words hit the mark. Gerard Sloyan in his commentary on John writes that *“The mutual love of Christians and their acceptance of the love of which Jesus gave proof by laying down his life (15:13) is the great public symbol of faith. Where it is lacking there is no Christianity, only a parched husk of forms and formulas.”*¹

THAT is what we come to see on Palm Sunday. Maybe that’s what they came for those two thousand years ago, too. We give the original story a bad rap, pointing out all the misconceptions that the Israelites had for the Messiah, but we know how the story ends and then we go and do the same thing! Maybe we’re all just struggling to understand God in this world. But mutual love, that’s something we can all wrap our heads around.

Again Gerard writes: *“The pain of life, separation, the cross cannot last forever. Live in hope.”*² Those last words “live in hope” stuck out to me. Dr. Mary Sue Dreier, a professor at Southern Seminary, started a congregation years ago with her husband. When they were trying to come up with names for the mission start, they had all these names around music and scripture, her husband being a lover of faithful worship and music. So they hit the streets and asked people outside places like Walmart and other stores what they thought. They asked if they were looking

¹Sloyan, Gerard S. *John*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 176.

²Sloyan, Gerard S. *John*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 178.

for a church which of the names they had would be the one they would want to attend.

Interestingly, the choices that Dr. Dreier and her husband had at the top of their list were picked the least and the choice that won, the name they picked for the congregation, was “A People of Hope.”

And that is what we are, that is what being a Christian means. In the face of death, in the face of worldly powers that seem impossibly strong, we hope in Jesus Christ. We stand together, holding hands and praying the Lord’s Prayer. We support one another and care for one another because, as Gerard said, it’s mutual love that becomes the greatest symbol of our faith. Let us never forget that. Amen.