

John 1:1-5, 14 & Mark 11:1-11
April 5, 2020 (Palm Sunday)
“Palms”
Rev. Lou Nyiri

Today is Palm Sunday. The day we celebrate:

– Jesus’ triumphal entry processional into Jerusalem to begin what we in the Christian Church call “Holy Week”

– The crowd waved Palm Branches & laid them (along with their cloaks) on the road as Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of

“Hosanna!”

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

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

This begins, in the Christian Church, the week that changed everything – “Passion Week.”

That word “passion” is pivotal for our faith:

– it is where we get our word *pathos* – which derives from the Latin *passio* meaning “to suffer”

– it meant to submit [to something],

to undergo an experience,

to be completely affected or overcome.

Hellenistic culture did not believe in gods that suffered – gods could not be overtaken.

Yet, we are a people who believe in a God who underwent suffering love on our behalf.

We remember how out of love for God’s creation, the divine self is poured out into human form and undergoes death on the cross.

God overcame distance to become one of us – to know us – to save us.

In this passionate act of self-giving love, God provides the means for our undoing & reclaiming.

In Jesus’ death, God declares, Kenda Creasy-Dean writes, that our *nobodiness* gives way to our identification as *God’s beloved*.¹

Our identifying *with* and placing our faith *in* the One who is God’s undoing *undoes* us from that which holds us down.

When we trust – as John’s gospel puts it – in...

– “*The Word made Flesh*

– *The incarnation of God*

– *The One in whom “we have seen the glory of the father’s only son, full of grace and truth”*

– *Jesus the Christ*)

¹ Dean, Kenda Creasy, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, p. 17, 19.

...we are remade and refashioned into new creations.

Jurgen Moltmann describes passion for faithful people – as a **double sense**, “The word ‘passion’ is well suited,” he writes, “to express the central truth of Christian faith. Christian faith lives from the suffering of a great passion and is itself the passion for life which is prepared for suffering.”²

We are redeemed through Christ’s passion on our behalf & in response to that passion we are moved by great passion to do something **about** the world’s suffering & sometimes to **endure** suffering on behalf of the world’s suffering.

I don’t know about you but words like these from Kenda Dean & Jurgen Moltmann resonate – deep within my being – given today’s climate.

I watch news reports...
I listen to updates on the radio...
I see the numbers rise...
I sit to pray and sometimes all I can speak is silence...

That is why we need Palm Sunday – to remind us of the protest cry that resounded then & resounds now...
It’s that one little word the people shouted.
It’s the phrase we find ourselves oft repeating of late – whether aloud or in the silence of our hearts & minds.

Hosanna!

Hosanna means “**help us**” – “**save us**”
Hosanna is a cry for help – it is a protest sign – so to speak.
Hosanna is not so much a **glory, hallelujah moment** /// It’s more of a **what’s going on...please fix this** moment.

Hosanna is a good word for us.
Amid words like pandemic, coronavirus, COVID-19 – Hosanna is **our** word.
It’s the moment we’re in – right now – *Help Us! Save Us!*
Hosanna is the word we **need**.

As I have sat with this word this week – I have been thinking of palms in a whole new way...
I’ve not been thinking, so much, about the palm branches we typically wave on this day – as I’ve been thinking about these palms – our hands ... I think we’re all paying closer attention to our hands these days.

² Dean, *Practicing Passion*, p. 19.

I thought about our hands...our palms a few different ways this week:

I thought about some popular waves – of old and of late – ways our hands can greet or show care and appreciation for one another...for instance:

Lou will announce the clip [then play clip]...

- ***Forrest Gump to Lt. Dan*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL24ydERm8k>
- ***Carlton Fisk – waving a long fly-ball to stay fair*** – (in point 32 seconds / out point 50 seconds) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WRi6iZAI-I>
- ***Famous Funny Waving Bear*** – in at 2 or 3 seconds and out at end video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT-reYMSmwg>
- ***Tina Fey – self high-five*** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRKswLG4TSM>
- ***The Queen*** – out at 16 seconds - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRb91GdKwWA>
- ***Royal Grandkids – who applauded the healthcare workers in England for the outstanding job they are performing*** - out at 12-13 seconds (after giggle) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls6sKSK9h6E>

We're all – for good reason – paying closer attention to our palms – our hands....

Wash them with soap and water for minimum 20 seconds – if soap and water is not available, then hand sanitizer.

Every handwashing is an act of grace & reminder of our baptism

– that we belong

– heart and soul

– in life & in death

– to Almighty God.

I've been thinking about the many ways human hands are bringing help, healing and hope to this world amid COVID-19.

So, I want to close with a 3:30 clip & a challenge...

The clip – you may have seen this week on social media – it is a newly launched YouTube show that dropped this week called “Some Good News with John Krasinski (a.k.a. Jim Halpert on *The Office* or star of Amazon’s series based on Tom Clancy’s *Jack Ryan* novels). The episode included cities all over the world applauding the hard-working medical community and ended with an interview between Krasinski and a young cancer survivor named Coco after she returned home following her final chemotherapy treatment to neighbors lining the streets & welcoming her home... ***[play clip]***

When you see Coco’s neighbors lining the streets & waving, it feels, for me, a bit like a Palm Sunday Parade.

Coco's closing thoughts resonate with me on this Palm Sunday – when she asks if she can say a thank-you to her nurses and doctors (I think we can all agree these are some of our modern day Saints) who are all working right now – the people who brought help, healing & wholeness to her –

Like Coco & the Royal Grandchildren – we give thanks for the palms / the helping hands of those who bring healing and hope into these days...

Thus, the challenge this Palm Sunday is twofold....

First - Who are the people bringing help ... bringing hope ... we need to thank?

Who are the people moved by great passion to do something **about** the world's suffering & place themselves at risk to **endure** suffering on behalf of the world's suffering?

Don't stop there – send a note in the mail / send an email or text / make a phone call / post on your social media platform – find the safe-physical distanced way to thank them...

- Is it a doctor or nurse...I would urge us to send our medical community and all healthcare workers postal mail or e-mail note (keep their phone lines open)
- Is it an EMT...
- Is it the nursing station or home care provider who looks after your relative when you cannot be there...
- Is it the custodial crew that cleans & sanitizes...
- Is it local law enforcement...
- Is it your postal carrier or parcel delivery driver...tape a note to the mailbox...*Thank-you for what you do!*
- Is it an elementary through high school teacher who learned a new way of teaching in two weeks to keep your education on track...
- Is it your college professor who re-formatted in-class lectures for online learning...
- Is it the IT people who keep online platforms and conferencing working so we can stay connected amid safe-physical distancing...
- Is it the grocery store or retail business clerk who stock shelves or brings groceries out to your car...you can applaud them from a safe distance and tell them how grateful you are for their service...
- Is it a family member... or ... friend ... or ... neighbor

Who are the people we thank God for who bring help & hope into this world.

Second – Our challenge is to re-frame our Hosanna...Maybe our Hosanna can be expressed in a prayer for all God's creation – for all God's children in this world who, **right now**:

- Have no TV or technology to watch a livestream worship or keep them connected to the world around them.
- For all God's children, who have no resources or lack adequate resources – like food, shelter or medical care – to keep them safe during this time...

- For those who are ill or confined to their home or hospital room...
- For those who are lonely or frightened...
- For all who carry some burden...
- For those who feel isolated...
- Those who grieve...the death of a loved one or simply the time we are in...

Maybe our Hosanna is a call to prayer that we will lean into the promise that into the world's suffering...there is a God who walks alongside us in our suffering – and grief – and isolation -

Hosanna! – *Help Us! Save Us!* – this is our word...

We'll get to hallelujah – that's our faith story after all –

Right now, though, we are in a Hosanna! Moment...

In the meantime,

- Let us raise our hands with gratitude to say, "*Thank-you!*" for the many who are bringing healing, hope and light into this moment;
- And let us continue to fold our hands in prayer to the God who promises to never leave us lost and alone & who promises to love us with a forever & for-always kind of love.

Amen & Amen.