

Sermon

In the Face of Insurmountable Odds

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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On this sixth Sunday of Lent we are faced with two divergent forces...the joy and celebration – the victory of Jesus triumphant march and the inevitable end we know he faces through the evils of man...those same joys and same sorrows you and I face on a daily basis. The Liturgy of the Palms and the Liturgy of the Passion occupy the same stage, their dramas unfolding so close in proximity that we struggle to make the emotional shift.

Jesus knows what fate he likely is destined to in these moments. And yet, he makes this proclamation along with his followers inviting us to shout “Hosanna”! and simultaneously bracing ourselves for what is to come.

Life brings many of these moments – these times when we feel on top of the world, like nothing can shake us, and we scarcely turn around and something catches us in tremendous grief – something we may not have seen coming but now are faced with.

While Jesus may have known what was to come, he chose to go forth anyway. And his disciples chose to follow as well as the entire community on that day – his energy, his power, his magnetic quality was unmistakable and they were drawn to it time and time again...but in this moment, showing public support and affection for this prophet could prove fatal. Uncommon courage of common people who transgressed religious and civil boundaries of acceptability to follow this man who exuded love and compassion for all. Their hosannas echo

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) commentary on Matthew 21:1-11 by Veronice Miles and commentary on Psalm 31:9-16 by Thomas Edward McGrath.

throughout the mountainous region – this is the undeniable presence of God in the world.

Save us! They shout. Save us! I think we have all been confronted with that type of feeling from time to time – maybe more often than we care to. Mass shootings, war, natural disaster – there is so much for us to grapple with each day – for us, for our children, for our families. Save us!

This leads me to notice something very powerful in our recounting today – if we are asking to be saved together, then we must believe we belong together. And we must believe on some level that we are able to accomplish more together than we can alone. History is filled with story upon story of common people who have been able to outlast and outthink the evil in our world and save people even save our world from evil. Youths who stood against apartheid in South Africa and formed the African national Congress Youth League in 1944 under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, envisioning a world in which racial domination would no longer exist. At the conclusion of his now-famous “I Have a Dream” speech, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in which justice would become the normative expression of human relationship. People hung onto those words, onto his energy.

It is critically important for us to reflect on this scripture and on all the instances when common folks stood for peace, love and unity in our world so that we to can find the courage to march with Jesus and proclaim his word of peace and reconciliation, despite we being just a small church in Niagara Falls. After all, Jesus followers had no special training or authority to change their world. We spend way too much time feeling powerless in this world today. We think because

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the government won't change things, we can't either. Maybe we can't change laws, but we can change how people see one another. Maybe we can't stop evil from doing the unthinkable every time, but maybe we can learn new ways of keeping children safe. Maybe we can't stop prejudice and hate in every person, but maybe we can change one or two toward the ways of love by showing kindness, generosity and peaceful language as we converse with those who think differently than we do.

Who are you going to "be" this lent? Are you going to confront evil with the strength of God's peace? Show kindness to a stranger who clearly needs a loving hand? Donate to a charity trying to do some good in our community or better yet, volunteer your time? Someone said recently instead of buying coffee for the person behind you in line at Starbucks who can clearly afford their coffee, call up your local school and pay off someone's lunch account who might be falling behind.

These little gestures, small things when done as a community lead up to really big things, at least for that person. But, let's face it, disciples – we are faced right now with insurmountable odds. Our Psalm says exactly how I felt this week after the latest school shooting – "Be gracious to me (to us), O Lord; for I (we) are in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and my body also." Like Jesus and his followers then, so much of what we do is at risk. Our Psalm talks of how people are scheming against him...and it seems this is true for us as well. Countless multitudes of God's people still even worship at risk in the world. Yet the Psalmist finds peace in this – while all may not be well, we can trust in the Lord.

I trust in you, O Lord, I say, “You are my God.” God does not make the evil, God does not make the violence within us and around us. God makes the love that can destroy it. The Psalmist knows this on a deeper level. Jesus came to show us just how brave, how strong and how loving we can truly be. Odd to say right before I read The Passion liturgy – but so true. The crucifixion is the ultimate act of love for creation. God is so worthy of our trust – God despite who we are and who we are not, declared we are worth it! And I believe we are as well. Despite the insurmountable odds we face in bringing God’s love, God’s word to our world – a world who seems to have found God irrelevant – we can do it! One loving gesture, one prayer, one prayer vigil, one basket auction gaining friends, one Easter Egg hunt, one Sunday School lesson, one sermon, and one loving, graceful, peaceful conversation at a time.

Amen