

Sermon

In the Face of Insurmountable Odds – The Final Irony

Pastor Lisa Elkington

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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On this Sixth Sunday of Lent, we stand again at the intersection of two powerful and opposing forces: **joy and sorrow, celebration and suffering, hope and heartbreak**. The Liturgy of the Palms and the Liturgy of the Passion occupy the same sacred space, unfolding so close together that we barely have time to catch our breath before celebration gives way to betrayal.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus enters Jerusalem not unaware, not naïve, but fully conscious of what lies ahead. This is no accidental parade—it is a deliberate, prophetic act. Matthew alone tells us that Jesus instructs the disciples to bring *both* a donkey and a colt, and that detail matters. At first it sounds confusing—how could he ride both? But Matthew is not asking us to think literally. He is asking us to see symbolically.

By naming both animals, Matthew holds together the tension at the heart of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus is both humble servant and rightful king. He fulfills the ancient promise of a Messiah who comes gently, not with force or domination. This is the final irony of Jesus’ life: the one deserving power refuses it; the one hailed as king chooses vulnerability; the one the crowds beg to “save us” will do so not by conquest, but by sacrifice.

So as the crowds shout *Hosanna!*—*Save us!*—Jesus rides forward knowing that the path of praise leads directly to the cross. The parade and the passion are inseparable. This is how Jesus saves: by being with us, by becoming one of us, and by loving us all the way through suffering and death.

Isaiah helps us understand what kind of courage this takes. “*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,*” the prophet writes, “*that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.*” But that gift does not shield the servant from suffering. “*I gave my back to those who struck me... I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.*” And yet this servant is not crushed, because “*the Lord God helps me.*”

Jesus knows the cost of love in an unjust world—and he chooses it anyway.

Life hands us moments like this all the time. One moment we are waving palms, feeling steady and hopeful, and the next we are confronted with grief, fear, or uncertainty we never imagined we would face. The same crowd that rejoices today will cry out in anger later this week—and if we’re honest, that tension lives inside us too.

What is extraordinary is not simply Jesus’ courage, but the courage of the people who walk with him. They risk ridicule, punishment, even death, simply for showing public solidarity with a teacher who proclaimed dignity for the poor, healing for the broken, and love for the outcast. Ordinary people crossing religious and civic lines to proclaim something dangerous: that *God’s way looks different from the world’s way.*

Their hosannas echo across hills and stone streets—*Save us!* Not just me. **Us.**

That matters. Because if salvation is something we cry for together, then it means we believe—perhaps even against reason—that we belong to one another. That we are stronger together than we are alone.

This past week, people across the world gathered—not in identical language or even identical purpose—but with a shared yearning: a refusal to accept a world

built on domination, cruelty, or fear; a longing instead for dignity, mutual care, and moral accountability. Without crowns or thrones, without weapons or armies, ordinary people showed up. Not perfect. Not unified in every detail. But present.

In that, I hear an echo of Palm Sunday.

History reminds us again and again that **change does not begin with the powerful—it begins with the faithful.** Young people who challenged apartheid. Communities who marched for civil rights. Neighbors who protected one another at great personal risk. Common people who believed that justice and compassion were not naïve ideals but holy callings.

We spend so much time feeling powerless. We tell ourselves nothing will change unless someone “up there” decides it should. But Jesus’ entire life tells a different story.

Maybe we cannot change every law—but we can change how people see one another.

Maybe we cannot stop every act of violence—but we can learn better ways to protect the vulnerable.

Maybe we cannot erase hate everywhere—but we can soften hearts through consistent kindness, truthful speech, and courageous love.

Psalms 31 cries out what many of us feel even now:

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress... my soul and my body also.”

We live in a world where worship itself is still risky for many, where grief feels relentless, where fear stalks our schools, our streets, and our headlines.

And yet the Psalmist dares to say:

“I trust in you, O Lord... You are my God.”

God does not create the violence.

God does not author the hatred.

God creates the love capable of dismantling both.

Jesus embodies that love completely. Even as we prepare to read the Passion, this is not a contradiction—it is the truth at the heart of our faith. The cross is not failure. It is **love poured out to its fullest extent**. God looked at a fractured, fearful humanity and declared us worth saving—worth loving—all the way to the end.

So who are you going to *be* this Lent?

Will you confront cruelty with God's peace?

Offer kindness where it costs something?

Give time, resources, or attention where need is real and unseen?

Someone recently said: instead of buying coffee for the person behind you who can afford it, call a local school and quietly help clear a lunch balance. That—right there—is Palm Sunday courage.

Small gestures, offered faithfully, become powerful when practiced together. One prayer. One vigil. One act of generosity. One conversation that refuses to dehumanize. One Easter egg hunt. One Sunday school lesson. One sermon. One loving expression of God's grace—over and over again.

The road from palms to the cross is short.

But the road from the cross to resurrection begins today.

Hosanna.

Save us.

And help us have the courage to walk with you. Amen.

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.