

# BAND TOGETHER - DEEPENING

## Palm Sunday

Psalm 118:13:23-26  
John 12:12-15

A Sermon Preached by  
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Seattle, Washington 98125  
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### CENTRAL FOCUS:

That we are brought into God's Vision and the depth to bring it forth by imagining it and celebrating it positively, tasting it here and now.

### Scripture – Read by Liturgists

From *The Message*, we have two related Scripture readings today Psalm 118, verses 23 to 26 and from the Gospel of John's community chapter 12, verses 12 through 15. The psalmist sings of a miraculous comeback, a saving from defeat and death. John's author echoes the same acclamation for saving at Jesus' entry to Jerusalem.

### **From the psalmist [Psalm 118:23-26<sup>1</sup>]:**

This is God's work.

We rub our eyes – we can hardly believe it!

This is the very day God acted –

Let's celebrate and be festive.

Salvation now, God. Salvation now!

Oh yes, God – a free and full life!

Blessed are you who enter in God's name.

From God's house we bless you.

### **From John's community [John 12:12-15<sup>2</sup>]**

The next day the huge crowd that had arrived for the Feast heard that Jesus was entering Jerusalem. They broke off palm branches and went out to meet him. And they cheered.

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in God's name.

Yes! The King of Israel. "

Jesus got a young donkey and rode it just as the Scripture has it.

No fear, daughter Zion:

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, translator. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*<sup>[1]</sup> (Navpress Publishing Group, 2002). Old Testament. Accessed 03/14/2019 at <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. New Testament.

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See how your king comes,  
riding a donkey's colt.<sup>3</sup>

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Pastor Todd Smiedendorf

Let us be in a spirit of prayer together.

Spirit of life and mystery,  
Draw us in so that the words spoken  
and the words heard  
Draw us forward into Your realm.  
May this be so.  
—Amen

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So, what is Palm Sunday really?

It's fun.  
There are ponies.  
Hallelujah!  
And there are children and waving and parades.  
Fun!

### **And there is more.**

Whether you see it as the end of the middle or the beginning of the end of the Jesus saga, it *is* a marking point in the story. For each of the four Gospels, the acclamation of Jesus upon entry to Jerusalem is told. And you might not know it, but there are very *few* stories – very few – that all four Gospels share and this is one of them. All four.

### **So something about this story must have been important to the early church, but what?**

And why have such a positive story when you know it's going to turn so tragic so fast? We may have a clue from the research around change. Research around *intentional change*. For it is clear that Jesus' ministry disturbs the status quo and brings change.

Dr. Richard Boyatzis, the researcher behind the book "Emotional Intelligence," has also researched intentional change [and] what makes it happen.

### **Simplifying his research I can summarize: Boyatzis points to positive and negative emotional**

**attractors.** That is, change is driven emotionally and by positives that we want and negatives that we don't want. So, not only is he saying that the data show change is an emotionally driven process – not rational – but that it takes both positives and negatives with the most effective change coming when we are in the positive focus more often, emotionally in touch with what we want more than with what we don't want. Both are present but more *positive* focus than negative is the most effective recipe.

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<sup>3</sup> "Reference to Zechariah 9.9. Warlike kings rode on horses and chariots; the king of peace, *on a donkey's colt.*" Footnote from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version. Oxford University Press, ©1991, 1994, p. NT145.

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### **Now I name this because it's important for a couple of reasons.**

Psychological research – and probably your experience of life (I'm willing to guess) – tells us that in several ways negative tends to hang around more, tends to have more of an imprint more of an impact than the positive. You know what I'm saying? Receive one negative statement and it dominates and overrides all the compliments you get. Just ask a pastor. *[Laughter]* It dominates the space.

News and media reflect this same trend. You remember the old news adage "If it bleeds it leads." The negative draws our attention so powerfully.

**If we add to that our postmodern perspectives and tools**, which have gifted us with the ability to deconstruct and critique, to *mentally take apart* social and linguistic systems, to see inside them and how they might be creating injustice or imbalance or something that we don't want.

We can see inside. And these points of necessary negative postmodern focus don't always *construct* the positive New Vision. They're good at *destructing*, taking apart. In other words, they show us – and helpfully – how we got what we don't want but aren't as good at showing us or focusing on what we *do* want. They call out better than they call in.



Boyatzis' research and that of others shows that having a **vision** for what we *do* want is effective and drawing us forward into it. It actually helps the process of change, to happen to be emotionally connected with that positive desired vision.

So then, what I'm offering this morning is that **there's a genius of having our Palm Sunday parade story – ponies and all – in all four Gospels** because somehow it seems this was understood. This was known that we have to have a celebration of the positive vision, an **emotional connection** with what we long for, to help it come forth. And so we, too –

we, too – as Pastor Amy just helped us practice, we, too, have to say our HOSANNAS, call out saying "Please save us now! Come! We long for this that you're bringing into town. We want to get on board." <sup>[4]</sup>

In its Hebrew roots "HOSANNA" simply means that "save, please save now". So we too must recognize and praise and celebrate the alluring beauty of – and passionate desire for – a new way of being together a realm where a leader rides in *not* on our warhorse of conquest but on a donkey of humility, where the proclamation is liberation for all God's creation, peace with justice, sustainability, equality, respect, sharing, cooperation, meaning.

### **Our call at University Church this Lenten season is "Band Together."**

And we better. For just like the story of the last week of Jesus, the tests will and have already come for us, too, like the environmental crises and growing inequality in a long list. *And* all that happens in

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<sup>4</sup> Illustration by Rebecca Rickabaugh, UCUC member. Used with permission

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our individual lives. And the powers that be – internal, as well as external – will *not* want change. The changes we experience and the changes we need will challenge us, just as Jesus met challenge when he came bringing good news of change.

### **And make no mistake Jesus brings change.**

His entry into Jerusalem in each gospel includes an immediate action that disturbs the status quo and sets in motion the pushback. The establishment will push back. Hard. This we know from our story. This we know from history.

The challenge of life and its birth pangs will come, the birthing of the new takes time and effort to bring forth. ***Our banding together will need to be deepened*** to get us through that push. It will need to be deepened to get us through what we are called to do and take us where we need to go.

Imagine Jesus coming into Jerusalem, into that center of power!

Now it's easy for us to make the circle from the parking lot around the building, remember. We know what's on the other side: more people who were in on the parade, more people who will love us and receive the message.

Jesus is marching in a different way, yes, bringing a positive message for many but knowing that it is possible, probable – perhaps even certain – to lead to his death. And yet he celebrates and marches on. Dr. King once said, “

If a person has nothing  
for which they are willing to die,  
they are not fit to live.

I pray that I can live up to that if that were called.

**The invitation of faith in our story this morning is to deepen our banding together by sharing and celebrating the positive vision of God's realm.** It's not Pollyanna. It's not denial. It's simply remembering our deepest taproot is YES. NO is simply the consequence of knowing. It's a compass; it's a taproot. We have to know where our YES is and ground deep into that. Deep. Because there'll be plenty of NO to come. We got to know what YES is and what it draws from. Palm Sunday is one of our opportunities to come back and say THAT, that's the parade we want to be in. That's the parade I will put my life into. That's the direction we're going no matter what it takes. That's my YES.

So do it with parades and ponies and waving and children – whatever it takes!

### **So do whatever it takes to keep that dream alive.**

Our tradition and the research both point in this direction. We have to imagine it and feel it deeply enough to taste it, like tasting those elements of communion. And you taste on your tongue, that foretaste of God's presence and coming realm. So this morning, my friends, I ask:

What are you hungry for?  
For what do we thirst?  
For what do we truly, deeply, long?

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What breaks your heart in the world,  
in the way that we have set it up and what happens?

I'm inviting you, asking you right now to get in touch with that.  
Bring it to mind and heart.  
Let your imagination bring it all present here and now.

Close your eyes if you need to. And imagine.

And now take *that* that breaks your heart and turn it upside down.  
Imagine now what we long for this world *is* accomplished:  
all of that negative into the positive reality.

What does it look like to be in a world of stable, sustainable climate?

What's it like to be in a world of economic and racial justice?

What does it sound like and feel like to be in a world of liberated and peaceful hearts?

What's it like to be in a world of thriving creatures?

You can see the orca and the salmon, the birds and bees.

Imagine them all thriving.

What's it like? What does it smell like in a world of lush and fruitful plants?

Bring it all here. Now.

Feel it.

Let your longing drive down a taproot to it.

Let that joy, let that YES flow through you now.

*This is God's dream.*

Let us dream God's dream.

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