

Blessed is the One

Depths of Love: Part 6 “Blessed is the One”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 24, 2024

Palm/Passion Sunday

Readings: Mark 11:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 15:1-39

Reflection: Psalm 118

Greeting: Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Entrance into Jerusalem: Mark 11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’ ” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “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!” Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. (Mark 11:1-11 NRSV)*

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, be with us in these forty days. On this day we remember your Son Jesus Christ triumphantly entering Jerusalem and those who spread palm branches along his way as they proclaimed him king. Those branches are signs of victory as we follow Christ in this journey to the cross. May we who bear them in his name hail him as Lord as we follow him in the way that leads to eternal life. May we hold fast to your great love, as demonstrated through devotion and sacrifice by Jesus Christ your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 118

The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.” I shall not die, but I

shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 118:14-29 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 118, and we hear of salvation from our Lord. That we bear witness to God's great love for his people. That we have cause to celebrate all that Christ is for us today. How do you celebrate God's love? Do you remember to celebrate that love in both good times and bad? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? What are you learning as we journey with Christ to the cross? How can we explore the depths of love we find in Christ as part of Lent?

Prayer: Almighty God, you are with us in the deepest depths of our hearts and the smallest thoughts in our minds. Your steadfast love and faithfulness have been shown to us in the example set by Jesus Christ our Lord. We turn to you in this time of reflection with the celebrations that we have spoken aloud. We come before you with the worries we have voiced out loud. But we also come before you with the silent pleading from within. The joys and the worries we hold are all before you. Help us to know your mercy and grace so that we may know you are with us in our triumph and our defeat. May we always find our way back to you through our laughter and our tears. May our love for you grow day by day, and may we love each other as a sign of the love we find through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 50, verse 4 through 9a.

The Lord God has given me a trained tongue, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens, wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend

with me? Let us stand in court together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? (Isaiah 50:4-9a NRSV)*

Our next reading is from Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 through 11.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 15, verses 1 through 39.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and

believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”
 (Mark 15:1-39 NRSV*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This last Sunday in Lent is a bit of an emotional roller coaster. We are faced with the highs and lows that come between the triumphant entry of Jesus entering Jerusalem like a king and his tragic death on the cross. Throughout Lent, we have been talking about this idea of giving up of self, giving up our selfish desires to be able to follow Christ to the cross. And here we come to the foot of the cross and see this example of giving up of oneself for the sake of others. This acts as a stark reminder of just how uncertain things can be and just how important it is that we support each other. Because we don't know when triumph will turn into tragedy. Our readings today help to give us a deeper concept of what Jesus faced and just how low our lows can be. But it also gives us an idea of the strength we can find in knowing that if we suffer for doing the right thing, that we face that justified in our hearts. We face it knowing Christ is right there with us. That God is never far from us in our times of difficulty. To help us understand the gift of God’s love, we have Christ on the cross as an example of selfless love. To have a deeper understanding of that we hear from Isaiah. We hear of listening to God even in the face of extreme difficulty. No matter what anyone does, if God is your helper, you cannot be disgraced. You cannot be put to shame because God is with you. That the innocent cannot be called guilty before God. That God is our strength in times of trouble. Philippians gives us another look at the sacrificial love that Christ shows. That we should strive to be like Christ in all that we do. That he empties himself, taking the form of a slave and humbling himself to the point of death. This is not shame, but a crown. That this is a sign of his strength, not his weakness. That his act is a sign of love.

Because as we've explored the depths of love throughout Lent, we are constantly reminded of just how much God loves each and every one of us. When reflecting on this emotional rollercoaster, I thought about the fact that Christ knows what is going to happen. He knows what is in store, yet he still takes this moment to celebrate. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem is a reminder that we still have cause to celebrate in the midst of sorrow. Because no matter how much it hurts to know what Christ went through for us, it is also a celebration of God's love to know what he was willing to go through for us. Because though it hurts to think about Jesus going through this terrible ordeal, seeing an innocent man being handed over for execution, we know that it was done out of love for us. It is the greatest love that one can show,

the giving up of oneself for another. The giving up of oneself for the world. It can be difficult to face that love sometimes. We can shy away from accepting that love because we don't always feel worthy of it. But that was part of the sacrifice. It isn't that we have done something to be worthy, it is that Christ loves us so much that he chose us as worthy. And when I think about that, I think about what the cross means to me. What it means to take up my cross and follow Jesus. Because I don't know if I have the strength to suffer as he suffered. I'm in awe of what he did for you and for me. Every time I look to the cross, I think of the example he set, and I am in awe. And I think if I could just be a little bit more like that, I could make the world a better place. If I could be a little less selfish today and a little more loving to others, I could make the world a better place. If I could let go of greed to embrace charity, I could make the world a better place. That the example set for me is that even if others don't agree with me, I can still do the right thing. When I follow Christ to the cross and I bear witness to that love, I can't help but be inspired to be more loving. To be that much more patient with others. To be that much kinder to a stranger. Because I'm humbled by what Christ was willing to do for me.

I think of those words they shouted out as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The Lord blesses the one who shares the depths of God's love with another. So, every day I think about ways that I can love God that much more and pray that I may reflect that love in the way that I love my neighbor. That I think about all the ways that Christ has strengthened me in love. All the ways that Christ has seen me through the most difficult of journeys. But I'm also reminded that God did not ever allow me to go through those journeys alone. Because as Christ was with me, so are my brothers and sisters in Christ. That as we come to the foot of the cross and we bear witness to God's love, we also bear witness to the fact that we are there together. That as we are in Christ and we live by Christ, we die by Christ, and we are raised in Christ. That we are bound together as one people with one hope, with one strength, and that we strengthen each other because Christ has strengthened us. We comfort each other because Christ has comforted us. And even when we cry out in despair, wondering where God is, we don't have to look far to know we are not alone. Even in the midst of sorrow, that brings me joy. Joy because I know that no matter how hard things get, we are there together with our Lord and Savior. That Jesus knows our pain. He knows our struggles. He knows our suffering. He knows our hearts. That we are bound together in love. That our Heavenly Father has never lost sight of us. That the Holy Spirit is there with us every step of the way. That we are called to remember the sacrificial love of the Son. Let us never forget in that act that there is joy. Because in that act we are set free. Free to love. Free to care. Free to do the right thing.

So, my challenge to you is this: in this final step to the cross, let us not look down in shame, but let us look up that we may behold that wondrous love. We may behold that this wondrous love has come near. That we may resist temptation to serve God for the sake of the gospel. That we may look and see the Son of Man lifted up for the salvation of the world. That we may reject the darkness and instead look to the light of Christ upon the cross. That whoever

serves Christ will be where he is, so we find ourselves at the foot of the cross. That we may bear witness and proclaim once again that blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. That we may look up and that we may be inspired by his selflessness. That we may be healed by his love. And that we may be strengthened by his humility. That we may be granted the courage to look up to Christ so that we may be strengthened to always have the courage to do the right thing. That we may give up of self to act on behalf of others. And that we may know and we may share the depths of love that we find in our Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Depths of Love

Our Lenten series explores the depths of love as we journey to the cross. Each week we take we reflect on the love that Christ has shown to each of us. And each week we take another step closer to standing at the foot of the cross.

February 18th – Has Come Near February 25th – For the Sake of the Gospel
 March 3rd – I Will Raise It Up March 10th – Loving the Light
 March 17th – Whoever Serves March 24th – Blessed is the One
 March 29th – Hail, King of the Jews

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Jeff & Laurie Davidson
Family of Brad Anderson	Marie R.	Connie Brown	Thelma Ball
Stephanie Strewsbury	Family of Ed Davis	Amanda Stults Charter	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells

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