

**April 9, 2017  
Matthew 21:1-11  
Isaiah 53:3-6  
Matthew 26:36-46  
Pastor Rosanna McFadden  
Creekside COB**

**Palm Sunday Meditations  
“In the Crowd”**

**Hosanna! Save us!**

**Those are the words which are ringing out in Christian worship around the world today. And even when we're not using the Hebrew word, “Hosanna,” calling out to God -- or our parents, our spouse, our children, whomever--to Save us! Is something we may do on a regular basis. I want to note, both now and later on in this service, what a different emotional tone that demand can have, depending on the context. We have physically set the stage for two very different scenes, and I am going to ask you to do some imaginative work to see how emotionally different these two settings are.**

**You've done a fine job of celebrating the triumphal entry with singing and waving palms -- and although that may be as lively as it gets in the Creekside church building, I imagine the actual scene was a lot less controlled: kind of a cross between a political rally and a parade. In fact, it was a political rally and a parade. On the other side of Jerusalem, the Romans were having one of their depressing spectacles, where military leaders rode in on war horses, followed by foot soldiers herding prisoners of war -- chained and beaten, starved, stumbling. If you were a Jewish citizen of Palestine, occupation by the Romans was nothing to cheer about. You might give a half-hearted “Hail Caesar,” if a soldier stared at you, or someone elbowed you in the side, but only so you wouldn't be next in the parade of prisoners.**

**But this Jew riding into the city -- *that* was a parade. Not much of a mount -- a donkey instead of a warhorse, but there were stories about this guy. He had fed thousands of people, healed cripples, cured diseases, cast out demons, given a blind man his sight. Some people even said that he'd raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. The Pharisees were pretty nervous, and that in itself was reason to go see what was going on. Once a crowd gathered along the street, then some of the children and young men started climbing trees to be able to see. And then they tore off branches to throw down for the rabbi to walk over, and people starting throwing down their cloaks, and one thing just kind of led to another. There was a lot of jostling and someone in the crowd spotted him coming and shouted "Hosanna!" Hurrah! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! You know how it happens in a crowd: pretty soon everyone was shouting - - even little kids who had no idea what the parade was about, but wanted to make as much noise as possible:**

**Hosanna! Save us! Down with the Romans! It wasn't quite a mob, but the whole city was in turmoil. The crowd was all worked up about this prophet and how he might save them from the Romans. If Jesus had stopped and told them that now was the time to take up arms against the Romans and make Palestine great again, there probably would have been a riot. As it was, Jesus rode past them and into the Temple and drove out the moneychangers and healed the blind and the lame, and the children followed him and continued to cry out, "Hosanna! Hurrah for Jesus!" and the Pharisees were angry and said to Jesus, "Do you hear what these kids are saying?" And Jesus responds, "Yes, I hear them. It reminds me of the psalm that says 'out of the mouths of babes you have prepared praise for yourself.'"**

**And now the Pharisees are madder than hornets. Who does this rabbi think he is? Any teacher who can get a crowd whipped up like this could be trouble. Pharisees can throw people out of the synagogue or the Temple, but they don't have the power to sentence anyone to capital punishment. They'll have to work eith the Roman authorities on that.**

**This crowd, by hailing Jesus as the Messiah and quoting scripture and shouting Hurrah! Hosanna! Save us! has signed the death**

warrant for Jesus. Those cute little kids in the Temple had no idea what this crowd had set into motion.

We're going to move into another chapter of this story. You have already given your offering of palms and sung Hosannas. The only way Jesus could save us was to give up his own life. As the ushers come forward to collect the offering, we'll sing 214 in Renew, Lamb of God. Our response will be the same tune, with words on the screen. Will the ushers please come forward as we sing?

### **"Alone"**

God, please don't make me go through this. Save me.

I don't know if you have ever prayed that prayer, or one like it. I have. We started with a parade into Jerusalem on Sunday, and now it's Thursday night. A lot has happened in past four days. The Pharisees have enlisted the help of the chief priests and the high priest, Caiaphas, to see that Jesus is arrested and put to death. One of Jesus' own disciples, a zealot named Judas, has met with priests, and he's willing to turn Jesus in when he can find the right time. Jesus shared a Passover meal with his disciples, including Judas, and Jesus thinks that despite their claims of loyalty, they will all desert him in the end.

And with that certainty of betrayal and death hanging on him like a shroud, Jesus goes to a garden to pray. I know this picture is familiar to many of you: not just this version of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, by Alton Tobey, but this actual picture. It hung for years in the front of the Elkhart City Church on the corner of Wolfe and Benham Ave. After several years in storage, it made its way here to Creekside. I don't pretend to know all the associations it has for many of you. Although it was sometimes covered with a curtain, this image of Jesus praying in the garden was a part of your worship and prayer and singing: it was in the background of your wedding ceremonies, baby dedications and memorial services. I don't know

what it meant for you and your community of faith to be shaped by this image of Jesus at prayer, but here are some observations:

Jesus tells his disciples how to pray -- the prayer we know as The Lord's Prayer -- and the gospels say that Jesus would withdraw by himself to pray. But the garden of Gethsemane is the only time we are told what Jesus prays when he is alone. It is a heart-wrenching prayer: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want." Jesus is in anguish, and begs his disciples to stay awake and pray, but they cannot stay awake. And Jesus knows that he will be alone until the end. Even as Jesus is rousing the disciples awake to leave, Judas arrives to betray him.

Save me, God. And Jesus, who came to save the world, knows that his death is coming and chooses not to save himself. It is so hard to understand why Jesus would choose to go alone; he could have called a legion of angels to rescue him. That's what the disciples -- maybe even Judas -- expected to happen. If it were my story, I'd be hoping for a dramatic rescue at the end. But that isn't how it happens. Jesus is arrested and beaten and humiliated and tortured and dies an agonizing death. Alone.

I began the season of Lent back in March by telling you that sometimes the only way out is through. Jesus' story is for all of us who have prayed, "God, please don't make me go through this. Save me" and then had to go through it anyway. Miraculous rescues happen, but not very often. The promise of the gospel is not that God will get us *out of* our pain -- if we just have enough faith or pray hard enough. The promise of the gospel is that God is with us *through* our pain, and offers new life and new hope on the other side. Although the disciples fall asleep and we don't see anyone else with Jesus in the garden, God is there, and Jesus knows God is there, because Jesus prays to his Father: "Please, if it is your will, don't make me go through this. But not my will, but your will be done." That is a prayer that any one of us can offer with the assurance that God hears us, and that God will be with us no matter what we go through.

There is more to this story -- as you know. The story of Jesus' crucifixion and death is central to our faith. Elizabeth and I have some suggestions about how you can make that story part of this

coming week. Listed in the bulletin are a series of scripture readings, one for each day. Take some time to read the story for yourself: use whatever version of the Bible you wish, or read several different versions. We will be using these same texts as part of our service at Creekside on Thursday evening. This is the Church of the Brethren Love Feast, which begins with a time of reflection, includes footwashing or handwashing, a fellowship meal, and bread and cup communion. This begins at 6:00 p.m., and everyone is welcome to come and participate in as much of the service as you wish. Following the Love Feast, we will hear the story of Jesus' betrayal and trial and crucifixion, and sing some of the songs from the American gospel tradition which we have been using in our worship services throughout this Lenten season. That part of the service will begin between 7:15 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Here's a more personal way to experience the story, which we are blessed to be able to offer at Creekside. We have our own Prayer Garden behind the church. If you haven't visited there, you ought to. It's available any time. However you wish to pray, but especially if you are burdened with sorrow or fear for the future, consider taking some time to pray in the garden. You can go alone; you don't have to tell anyone what you share with God, but I suggest that you put yourself into God's hands, and ask that God's will be done in your life, knowing that God will not leave you and that God wants what is best for you.

Blessings for the days ahead, as we remember and follow the path which Jesus walked to Calvary and death -- and walked past death into resurrection and the new life of Easter. As we prepare for our final hymn, I ask that you take some moments in silence when we are done singing. You may leave the worship Center when you are ready. Please leave in silence and greet your brothers and sisters in Christ in the Gathering Area. We hope to see you back at Creekside on Thursday evening.