

April 14, 2019  
Philippians 2:5-8  
Pastor Rosanna McFadden  
Creekside COB

## **“Lifted Up”**

**Good morning. This is a Sunday when we remember the heights and depths of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The children, helped by your singing, helped enact the best part of the week: Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke do not tell us conclusively what day of the week this happened: we know it was before the Feast of the Passover, and that Jerusalem was jammed with pilgrims who were in town to observe that holy day. The worst part of the week, as you know, is Jesus’ crucifixion on a cross and his death on Friday afternoon. Next Sunday, of course, we will gather here to celebrate Easter and Christ being raised from the dead. It is a breath-taking narrative, and an emotional and spiritual roller-coaster: from Palm Sunday, to Passover and last supper with the disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to torture and death to resurrection. I am not going to attempt to tell that entire story this morning: you can read pieces of that story in our devotional book, all of that story in the gospels, or you can come back to Creekside this Thursday to share a meal and communion as Jesus did with his disciples, and hear Mark’s account of Jesus’ death and crucifixion. It’s a story we revisit every year: it is the most dramatic and the most important story of our faith. For Christians, it’s a matter of life and death.**

**If you have worshipped at Creekside in the past five weeks, you know that we have been exploring Growing in Grace; [Slide] How we grow and mature as followers of Jesus, and how we are saved by his grace. The events of this week in Jesus’ life are the culmination of that grace and salvation. I want to pause here a moment and talk about a concept which I think is especially relevant to Palm Sunday. That is irony. Irony is when you use a word to mean the opposite of its literal meaning: as in, “I waiting in line for 40 minutes at the post office and**

then discovered I had forgotten my wallet, which was *awesome*.” Or irony can be a disconnect between what might be expected and what actually happens, such as: “I’m driving to North Dakota in February with my mother-in-law and my ex-husband: what could go wrong?” The answer of course is, plenty.

That is the kind of irony which is loaded into Palm Sunday -- we don’t actually get a reference to palms in Luke, but people throwing their cloaks in the road works just as well. [Slide] This is what people were shouting: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! Save us! These crowds in Jerusalem were acting like Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One, come to save them. The irony, of course, was that was exactly who Jesus was: the Messiah, the Anointed One, come to save them. Just not in the way they expected. As a people oppressed and occupied for generations by the colonial power of Rome, the Jews were expecting a military, or at least a political Savior; someone who would return their country and their government and their tax revenues to them. Of course that person would be a Jew, anointed by God for the holy work of demolishing the enemies of Judaism.

I have to imagine this kind of power and acclaim would have been a temptation for Jesus: not just the approval of the crowd in Jerusalem that day, but to save his people from their political and economic oppression. He loved the Jewish people, his disciples, their families, his friends. Although Jesus had met and praised Roman individuals in the course of his ministry, there was no doubt that his roots and his education and his heart was with the Jews. He had the divine power and the human support to go after the Romans in Palestine. That’s what the crowd wanted him to do and was cheering for him to do: Jesus was the Messiah, and Messiahs save their people. Hosanna!

It turns out salvation in Christ comes in a radically different way. Not one the people were excited about at all. This was not a new tension in Jesus’ ministry: In Mark 8 and Matthew 16, Jesus begins teaching that he is going to be rejected by the Jewish establishment and killed, and after three days rise again. Peter pulls Jesus aside and says, “You might go easy on all that suffering stuff, it kind of turns people off.” Do you remember what Jesus says to Peter? Get behind me,

**Satan! Of course this would have been a temptation for Jesus; he had to have felt the tension between God's will for salvation and what people -- even the disciples who were his closest friends--wanted and expected Jesus to do.**

**[Back to logo] Throughout Lent we have been using the image of a tree for spiritual growth: healthy trees have a vigorous root system -- not visible above ground, but a means of gathering nutrients and supporting the rest of the tree. A tree must have a trunk which is sturdy enough and flexible enough to withstand wind and storm; trees which grow together protect one another. And finally, the roots and trunk support the branches which spread out so that thousands of leaves can find sunlight and grow and flourish. These branches are lifted up.**

**In John chapter 3, Jesus is referring to himself when he says, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." And you have probably heard what comes next in verse 16: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Being lifted up did not mean being honored and praised by a crowd who was hoping for a military victory or a political coup. Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One who was given by God to demonstrate God's love for the world. This was not what the crowd asked for in a Messiah: ironically, it was exactly the Messiah they got when that Palm Sunday crowd turned into a Good Friday mob shouting "Crucify him!"**

**[Slide] Paul's letter to the Philippians was written in the late 50's or early 60's: about thirty years after Christ's death. In Chapter 2 he quotes one of the earliest known Christian hymns: it is written in two stanzas or verses. The verse is about Jesus' life and death -- that he was obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. This is the earthly way in which Christ was raised up: literally nailed to a cross of wood sturdy enough to support the weight of a person. Sometimes the nails were driven through the bones in the wrist, so the person couldn't free his hands by tearing through the flesh and finer bones of the hands. Victims of crucifixion could live for several hours or several days, depending on their health and how much they**

had been beaten or tortured before they were crucified. Although the gospels tell us that Jesus was pierced in the side by a Roman soldier, the actual cause of death would likely have been suffocation: the weight of your own body hanging made it difficult to exhale. That build-up of carbon dioxide would cause tissue damage and the breakdown of organ systems which would leak blood into the heart liver and lining of the lungs. Roman soldiers would break the prisoner's legs after a few hours so they could no longer push up with their feet to help inhale.

This is not the kind of lifted up which anyone imagined on Palm Sunday. The people wanted a victory, not a victim. The disciples must have been delighted at the attention and that Jesus was finally getting the recognition he deserved as the Messiah. But Jesus had to know. He had to know that the crowd had it both right and terribly wrong. He was the Messiah, but not the Messiah they expected; he was the Messiah they were going to crucify. He could have turned back then and saved himself and let the people perish. He could have turned back on this coming Thursday night when he knew that one of his disciples had betrayed him and the rest were asleep while he was sweating drops of blood. He knew that the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers were coming, and he knew what they would likely do to him. He wanted that cup to pass him by -- who wouldn't? -- but he prayed "Father, not my will, but Yours be done." He was obedient even to the point of death.

And that friends, is where grace happened. When Jesus emptied himself of the human acclaim he was entitled to, and the divine power which was his birthright and took the form of a slave in human likeness. Jesus, God's Son, blameless and perfect, allowed himself to be killed by a corrupt establishment that was threatened that the might seize human political power -- power which Jesus knew to be an illusion-- false power to impress a crowd who had no idea who he really was. Instead of claiming that Palm Sunday power, Jesus chose to trust in the power of God and was obedient even to the point of death on a cross. That is where we will be on Friday.

[Slide] But Jesus' death is not the end of the story. We will be at a different place next Sunday than we are this Friday. There is another verse to the hymn in Philippians; a verse which begins: Therefore

**God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. Christ who was lifted up on a cross on Friday will be exalted on Sunday morning: raised from the dead into everlasting life. It's a wonderful story: it's a promise for eternity. The only way to Easter and eternal life is through Good Friday and a willingness to empty ourselves of any illusion of our own power and glory. Our richest gain is loss compared to the power of the cross and the grace of Jesus Christ.**

**Blessings for the week ahead. If you are not able to join us here at Creekside on Thursday evening for our Love Feast and Good Friday service, please make time to read and pray on your own or with another community of faith. God bless you. Amen.**