

“The Calling Of A Lifetime”
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Luke 19:28-40

Palm Sunday is fundamentally about justice. This is the day that Christians around the world begin to celebrate the passion narrative: the significance of Jerusalem, the Upper Room and Gethsemane, the crucifixion, and resurrection for the salvation of humanity. Yes, God is faithful. Yes, God is just. Yes, joy and obedience go together.

Not much joy in the lives of the Jewish people that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus did not fulfill what the Jewish people believed their kings were to do...create a powerful nation and subdue the oppressor. Instead, Jesus led as one oppressed, espousing the virtues of poverty, selflessness, passivity, and sacrifice.

The good news of the gospel calls us to identify with the oppressed. Keith Hartsell from Wheaton, Illinois relates this story,

I was with a friend a few years ago in California, and as we were driving around the busy streets of L.A., I noticed that his cell phone was locked with an unusual password—*pro nobis*. I asked him what *pro nobis* meant and why he chose that for a password. He told me it was Latin, and it meant “For Us” and then he suddenly started choking up. I thought, *Why would those two Latin words cause so much emotion?* He composed himself and then explained that after walking through deep personal pain, true healing came when he learned that God is “for us”—or the Latin phrase *pro nobis*. My friend said that after his parents’ divorce, a season when he assumed that God didn’t care or that God had given up on him, he finally found hope through those two simple words. When he decided to believe that God was *pro nobis*, that God had even sent Christ to die for him, he could then decide to lay down his life for others.¹

Psalm 118 is a festival psalm. Jewish people read this psalm at Passover recalling God’s deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt. Christians read it to commemorate

¹This illustration found on preachingtoday.com

God's faithfulness to the church and our requisite call to be faithful. Jesus does not measure up to the traditional and accepted understanding of king, however. Israel's inability to recognize Jesus' definition of king is the Christian's as well. Eric Wall, Assistant Professor of Sacred Music, and Dean of the Chapel at Austin Presbyterian Seminary in Austin, Texas writes, "Holy Week is the 'chief cornerstone' of the Christian year, when the central story is most fully recalled and enacted."² When Jesus entered Jerusalem, his demonstration of God being for us is a parade that does not lead straight on to Easter. The parade leads to "... sorrow, betrayal, and death"³ This is one reason why Psalm 118:1 reads, "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever." This verse was relevant in the 6th century BCE, as well as in the 1st century CE. It is relevant today in the 21st century CE.

Jesus was faithful to the mission of justice. He made the way clear for all humans to respond to God's unconditional love for them in Jesus Christ. In this regard, Luke 19:28-40 demands our attention. On the way into Jerusalem, Jesus reframed the title, "LORD." He identifies the title rather than it him.⁴ Jesus brought peace in a just way, because of his identification with the oppressed; the rejected stones. When the Pharisees said to Jesus in Luke 19:39, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Jesus answered in Luke 19:40, "... I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."⁵ Silence to injustice is debilitating. Speaking out against injustice is the command of Jesus. Jesus viewed salvation through the lens of justice; personal and social. Jesus accomplished

² Eric Wall in in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 109.

³Ibid, 110.

⁴Adapted from Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 136.

⁵Luke 19:39-40

justice through his baptism; earthly obedience to the will of God; a demeaning march into Jerusalem; reframing the meaning of Passover in the Upper Room; betrayal by Judas; dying on the crucifix of a common criminal; and raising from the dead.

As followers of Jesus, we must give voice to the other, the person different than ourselves. In this way, we are truly inclusive. Peter J. Gomes former Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard University writes, “Given that... the disparities between the rich and the poor increase rather than lessen and that Christians fight with one another for power and influence while the culture seems to deteriorate... [might we] unite in a social wisdom that goes beyond the Bible and into a whole gospel for the whole person?”⁶ Jesus lived his life to benefit the whole person.

Let us give voice to those who are voiceless. Let us espouse the virtues of selflessness and sacrifice. Let us speak and live the calling of a lifetime. God is *pro nobis*, “For us!”⁷ Amen!

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 10 April 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

Copyright © 2022
Steven M. Marsh
All rights reserved.

⁶Peter J. Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, (New York City, New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 186.

⁷I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Eric Wall, Patrick W. T. Johnson, and Lucy Lind Hogan in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 2*, 108-110, 111-113, and 113-114.