

PASSION HOPE
[written in oral form]

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; John 12:12-16,19
Palm Sunday, Year B

March 28, 2021
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I once lived in a very old house.
While there, I started digging a hole in the back yard to plant a tree. A couple feet down, I encountered a brick, and then more bricks.
Curious, I expanded the hole and dug deeper.

Deep called to deep. After a few loose bricks, an intact cylinder made of bricks appeared.
Then, I found old glass bottles and broken pieces of pottery.

At that point, I stopped. I concluded that I was digging out the chamber for an old outhouse or a septic tank.

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Digging deep will likely render some surprises.

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On the surface, Palm Sunday is a fun parade.
Digging into it we find Passion Sunday.

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Jesus' festive approach to Jerusalem is full of symbolism intended to project a strong message.

Today's Psalm passage refers to God's chosen one in a procession with admirers waving branches.

The palm branches would connect the crowd to the nationalistic Maccabean era. Palm branches were on coins as a reminder of that period of strength and resistance.  
Palm branches were a symbol for the Maccabeans.  
Waving palm branches would not go unnoticed.

Riding the young donkey confirmed the strong message.

Zechariah 9:9 predicted the Messiah would come in such a way, and would bring peace--a peace from conquest.  
The crowd knew this and so did the religious leaders.

Those waving the branches yelled out, "Hosanna", which means save us/ deliver us Now.

They shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord--**The King of Israel.**"

The King of Israel was arriving. That was significant.

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What unfolded was no accident.

That procession was a deliberate orchestrated provocation.
Jesus was confronting the leaders in Jerusalem and their system. He definitely got their attention.

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The enthusiastic, cheering crowd were there mostly for the spectacle.

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The time had come for Jesus to challenge the established system. His message was getting lost in all the hype.
His fandom knew about his miracles, especially about restoring Lazarus back to life.

They were flooding social media with selfies near Jesus.
The crowd was full of excitement and hope.
They were hoping for a Messiah to lead an uprising against the Roman rulers.
No doubt, they were hoping for more miracles, too.
Miracles are awesome.

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Jesus' ministry of public proclamation was nearing an end.  
So, with symbolic messaging that was magnified by the crowd, Jesus sent notice to the ruling elite that he had arrived.

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Strangely, the disciples did not get what was going on.
However, their ignorance was often used to alert the reader to be informed.

Clearly, the Pharisees understood.
In verse 19, they sighed, "Look, the world has gone after him."
Then, they plotted how to terminate Jesus.

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Confrontations are risky, as are mass protests.  
Those in power defending the status quo resist change. They do not want their power diminished. The system keeps them strong.

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Protests happen from hope. The protestors hope for change and better way.

All the Black Lives Matter marches were launched from hope.
Those numerous peaceful rallies were a threat. So, the rulers inserted violence into them to alter public opinion.

Empowered Black people expose the racist system, and the racist system fought back.
The presence of large numbers of Black people marching was perceived as a threat. Black people have less power, yet there is strength in numbers.
They were challenging the powerful defenders of the unjust order and policing.
Black people and other supporters took to the streets in hope. They hoped to change systemic racism.
They hoped for justice.

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On January 6, a huge white crowd gathered in "hope".

They hoped to block change.

Interestingly, they projected their malicious intent with all kinds of symbols. One aggressive symbol was the mythical horned Viking helmet. Vikings were notorious invaders in the most violent manner.

An aside, Vikings never used horned helmets. That was a fabrication by Germans in the 19th century when they were fascinated by Norse mythology.

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Unfortunately and sadly, the white crowd was not deemed a threat,.....until they got violent, Even though the violent messages were there.

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People are protesting in Myanmar and receiving violent reprisals. They act in hope.

Likewise, in Belarus, Russia and Hong Kong.

Against the odds they confront the powerful authorities hoping for justice, hoping for change and a better way.

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Hope inspires action, even if it is risky.

With hope, people are willing to sacrifice and confront the threats.

Hope sees potential change. A hope means it can happen.

A wish only dreams of change.

Wishing for a better world does not move anyone to action.

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No doubt Jesus hoped to bring reform to the religious system that was unjust and kept people subdued.

He hoped people would put their trust solely in God.

Jesus hoped all would discover God's way of living.

He hoped love and grace would prevail.

He hoped for peace, real peace.

Yet, Jesus keenly knew and foretold of the violent reaction he would receive.

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Entering Jerusalem was a turning point.

The admiring crowds quickly learned that he was Not the conquering Messiah who would start a revolution against Rome.

They faded away, lost faith in him, and even got angry.

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Aside from getting a lot of attention, what did Jesus accomplish by going to Jerusalem?

He once encouraged the label of King, yet during his trial, would not admit it.

Jesus appeared defeated.

What was he thinking when he decided to strongly confront the leaders?

When tested, he looked weak. Jesus did not even prove himself with dazzling miracles.

What could Jesus do?

When tested, he did not reveal power. What good is Jesus?

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Some segments of Christianity only use Jesus as the means to get into heaven. Yet, that claim cannot be tested.

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Why did Jesus risk all, even his life, by confronting the authorities? Until then, he was winning people over.

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I think it comes down to the passion in a deep hope.

Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently clarified this.  
He said the following quote not long before His death.  
[Stanford University Library]

“If you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for it, then you aren’t fit to live.

You may be thirty-eight years old, as I happen to be, and one day some great principle, some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for some great issue, some great cause. And, you refused to do it because you want to live longer.

You’re afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you’re afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house.

So you refuse to take a stand.

Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety, but you are just as dead at thirty-eight as you would be at ninety. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

You died when you refused to stand up for right.  
You died when you refused to stand up for truth.  
You died when you refused to stand up for justice.  
Don’t ever think that you’re by yourself.  
Go to jail if necessary, but you never go alone.

Take a stand for that which is right. And, the world may misunderstand you, and criticize you. But you never go alone, for one with God is a majority.”

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Willing to die for justice and righteousness is living.

This is **Who** Jesus was. That is **what** Jesus did!
Jesus lived his hope and trust in God all the way through Jerusalem.

Pushing on and confronting corruption and injustice is the passion of Christ.
Regardless of the outcome, Jesus was faithful to God.
His passion was his deep hope and faith in God and God's way.

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So, are we simply admirers of Jesus or do we hope to follow Christ?

Are we passionate for God's way???? Are we alive?  
Today is Now Passion Sunday.