

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**The Rev. Robert M. Alexander**  
**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Mark 11:1-11**  
**“I Believe...We Trust: That God Has Saved Us!”**  
**Passion/Palm Sunday**  
**March 29, 2015**

I don't know if it is still a popular choice among scouts but when I was a teenager everyone wanted to get their Boy Scout Life Guard badge. Camp Raven Knob, where our troop from Boone went every summer, offered the training that was needed for a scout to receive the badge and so I decided to make that my goal one summer.

I remember this game that the counselors would play. No matter where you were or what you were doing -- if one of them was in the water and yelled the word “PINEAPPLE” followed by your name then you had to drop everything and run to their aid. You had to use whatever lifesaving techniques that you had been learning to try and get the person safely out of the water. They may be flailing about or tipped over in a canoe without a life jacket – no matter the case you had to go in after them.

I remember one particular occasion when, at the end of the day, I was on my way to the dining hall. I was a good 150 yards or so from the waterfront and I heard it. “PINEAPPLE ROBERT.” I dropped everything and sprinted to the lake to save the counselor who was out in the water.

When I came to this familiar text of Jesus Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem I imagined the people in the crowds in a somewhat panicked state yelling “PINEAPPLE - JESUS.” As if they were in over their heads in the water and needed someone to throw them a line or swim out to rescue them from certain death.

Usually we imagine this scene in the streets of Jerusalem as a happy occasion. Almost like a parade or a festival with people shouting words of praise to Jesus. The word “Hosanna!” is a complex word of praise and adoration but it also literally means “Save Us Now!” There is a hint of desperation in its meaning.

Mark's telling of the story is interesting. We don't actually get to the entry into Jerusalem until verse 8. The first seven verses are the set-up. Uncharacteristic of Mark, suddenly things seem to slow down in the story. The first ten chapters were rushed, as we have said before, everyone seemed to be in a hurry. But now that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, the tempo slows and continues to slow through each day as we approach the cross and the final events in the life of Jesus.

Jesus and his followers approached the city that day and somehow he had everything worked out ahead of time. The events took place just as he said that they would and no one seemed to find that peculiar – and neither do we – because we know who Jesus is and we know Mark's purpose in telling the story. But the followers of Jesus – those in the crowds - still didn't seem to understand where all this was going. They saw Jesus riding into town and they treated him like royalty, laying cloaks and branches on the ground in front of him, and shouting ancient words that were reserved for a King. Jesus didn't say a word. He was silent – neither encouraging them nor discouraging them. You can almost see his head turning from side to side gazing upon the people with pity in his eyes. It's Luke who records Jesus' tears as he wept over the city, but I sense a sadness in Jesus' eyes in Mark as well.

New Testament scholar Lamar Williamson, suggests that Jesus' followers didn't understand his destiny as the Son of Man. He writes, "For Jesus, (the Triumphal Entry) is an entry into suffering and death. He enters Jerusalem as a pilgrim, and as more than a pilgrim. He makes no response to a royal acclamation but his silence seems to suggest, "I am Messiah, and I will save, but not as you expect."<sup>i</sup>

There is that word "Save" again. The crowds, you see, did look to Jesus as one who would deliver them from the oppression of Roman rule. They had seen, heard about, and experienced Jesus' power to heal, Jesus' authority to teach, and Jesus' ability to control the natural and the supernatural world. They were placing their hope in this one who rode into their city and who seemed to fulfill the prophetic vision of Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

So they shouted the words fit for a King that were used during the festival days to celebrate God's liberating power to save and to restore the fortunes of Israel. It is interesting that these words come from a Psalm - Psalm 118 - that in one verse states that the Lord is our salvation and in the next states "the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. (Psalm 118:22) In Acts 4, the Apostle Peter spoke of Jesus as the "stone that the builders had rejected." The crowds - shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." - were the very ones who, at the end of the story, changed their shouts to "Crucify Him!" They rejected Jesus as their King because he didn't prove to be the kind of ruler that they thought they needed. They lost their confidence in his ability to save them.

And so it is with many of us. We have a certain expectation of what it looks like for God to save us and when it doesn't seem to pan out the way we would like we begin to lose faith...we lose our confidence - perhaps in God's ability to save us or even worse, in God's desire to do so. But perhaps like the crowds, our notions of salvation are a bit off the mark. It is true that salvation, at its core, has to do with being delivered from something which robs one of life, peace, and wholeness. In other words, we desire salvation from whatever gets in the way of that biblical notion of shalom.

Superficially, I suppose, if we are working on our taxes, we might say we need salvation from the IRS. Or if we are in the NCAA tournament, we might say we need salvation from such-and-such a team, or if we are under a great deal of stress at work or at school we might think about being saved from certain demands...for these things, we think, rob us of our peace. In similar fashion, we might think of being saved from indebtedness, addiction, illness, or abuse. We think about those who are in the midst of tragedy in our world praying for salvation and deliverance - from a plane that is going down, from a house fire, from a devastating typhoon, from terrorists who are kidnapping and killing one's family members. I imagine the prayers ascending to God for salvation and honestly don't understand how God answers those prayers. And, of course, we think about being saved from sin - that which invades our decision making ability and our relationships and turns good intentions into bad ideas. I believe and we trust that God saves us from all this which threatens us even when we don't understand how God answers those prayers for deliverance. Sometimes, clearly, we are saved by the removal of the threat, and other times we are saved by a change within us.

Throughout scripture we read about how our God is a God who saves. We find that God saves in an eternal and "out there" sense - from the ultimate effects of sin and death - and also that God saves in a very present sense - here and now. God saves us from our own selfishness and pride - our own struggle

to find meaning in life – our own fear and anxiety. God – in Christ – has come near, to identify with us in our weakness, and to remind us of who we are as God’s children in the face of adversity and suffering.

And if we think about being saved from all this then we must also think about being saved for something. And scripture, through and through, suggests that that something is **love**. We are saved for love – for the sake of love – for the sake of God’s love for us and so that we might respond freely to the call to be a people of love. Love changes everything. This afternoon – as we gather to celebrate the life of Bob Manning – we will read the familiar words from the Apostle Paul – that nothing in all of our experience – in all of life and even death itself – nothing can separate from God’s love in Jesus Christ. I believe...we trust...that in Christ God has saved us! But when our expectations aren’t being met it is sometimes difficult to see it.

Pastor and author Max Lucado tells of the time some years ago when he took his family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for his five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny “Starlett” with a banana seat and training wheels. And Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well.

Max explained to Andrea that she was too young. He told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler. No luck; she still wanted a bike. The child’s father explained to her that when she was a bit older, she would get a bike, too. She just stared at him. He tried to tell her that a big bike would bring her more pain than pleasure, more scrapes than thrills. She turned her head and said nothing.

Finally Max sighed and said this time her daddy knew best. Her response? She screamed it loud enough for everyone in the store to hear: “Then I want a new daddy!”<sup>ii</sup>

Max Lucado, out of love for his daughter, denied her a bicycle so that she would be safe and wouldn’t get hurt. But Andrea couldn’t recognize her father’s love in that.

The crowds that day in Jerusalem wanted something specific from Jesus and when he didn’t deliver they wanted a new King. They couldn’t recognize the love that Jesus had for them – a love that caused him later that week to get on his knees to wash his disciples feet – a love that caused him to go quietly with the soldiers who came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane – a love that caused him to submit to their torturous blows that tore at his flesh – a love that caused him to stand trial and to be condemned to death as an innocent man. They couldn’t recognize the love that he had that caused him to go to the cross and to offer up his life for the sake of the world so that we might be free to live as God’s people of love.

Archbishop Rowan Williams wrote that “Holy Week... comes to gather us around the one true holy place of the Christian religion, Jesus himself, displayed to the world as the public language of God, placarded on the history of human suffering that stretches along the roadside. This is a week of learning – not management, bargaining, and rule-keeping, but naked trust in that naked gift.”<sup>iii</sup>

As we join the crowds crying out for salvation we must humble ourselves and let go of ourselves in order to understand what that salvation is and how it offers us new life. Christ’s gift of self – his gift of love – transforms us and sets us free. He has saved us – though we may not yet see how. “I believe...we trust.”

When you came into worship this morning you were given a palm cross. This is symbolic of Jesus' Holy Week journey. From the streets of Jerusalem to the hillside of Calvary – Jesus walked in love for you and me – to save us and to set us free. Let this be a sign and symbol for you to discern in your heart what this salvation means for you.

### **Scattered Palms**

The crowd swelled with excitement  
Waiting for their newly anointed one  
Who enters into the Temple of the heart  
We opened the gates  
For our victor to enter  
To welcome this the Savior-soldier  
The warrior-king  
The one who will liberate us from oppression and cruelty  
They yelled from the top of their lungs  
“Hosanna – Save Us!”  
From the enemies that threaten to devour us  
“Save Us!”  
From ourselves  
Lifting our palms to the air in celebration

I cried out from the crowds that day,  
One voice in a sea of people  
One among many who carpeted the ground  
With coats and palms  
With hopes and dreams  
For something better in this world  
To make of it what I will  
I placed all my passions  
Upon this teacher,  
The Master  
Of bread and fishes  
Of the deaf and blind  
Of miracles and spectacles

But he was on a donkey  
Not a noble steed  
Who was brought down low  
Self-giving  
Seeking to rescue the outsider  
To save us from our sins  
“Who is this?” we questioned  
“Then who are we?” we replied  
Were we disciples following him  
On this inglorious, triumphal road

They did not turn an ear to him

But made of their hearts a stone  
And rejected him  
Broke him over the rock  
Of all their hopes and fears  
Trampled palms  
Scattered ashes<sup>iv</sup>

**To God be the Glory! Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Lamar Williamson, Mark: Interpretation Commentary Series (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983), p. 204

<sup>ii</sup> Max Lucado, Trusting More, Worrying Less

<sup>iii</sup> Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgment: Sermons and Addresses* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), p. 57.

<sup>iv</sup> Kelly Hall and Phuc Luu (Based on the Liturgy of the Palms and the Liturgy of the Passion)