

# **“High Notes and Somber Tones”**

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Providence United Methodist Church

Palm/Passion Sunday

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Today’s Palm text is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 21, verses 1 through 11. I’ll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Lord, bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. We trust hearts are prepared. Move in this place and cause your word to prosper. Amen.

The parade—it was a king’s procession. The people were looking for someone to save and rescue them from the Romans. Finally they thought they had a deliverer—finally someone to lead them to victory. And at last they had someone to stop the oppression and injustice. They shouted loud hosannas. They cried out lots of praise. They laid their coats on the road and cut branches from the trees as Jesus made his way into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. They were so excited.

Finally. . . finally a king. At last, someone who would take charge and lead them in triumph! The crowd was ecstatic and full of excitement. People screamed and shouted to their king “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” They shouted Hosanna—it means “Save us!”

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead and what a hero’s reputation he now had! Many of the people who saw the raising could’ve been in Jerusalem that day or maybe they heard about it. They saw Jesus as a star—a Deliverer! It was the Passover, and truly Jerusalem looked and felt like a circus that day. The streets were crowded and dusty. It was full of life with kids running everywhere and people of all ages were making preparation. It was exciting! Jesus couldn’t have picked a better day. Families were arriving from their journeys, and Jewish national pride was bursting! Jesus had made a good impression on some of the people, but the religious men hated him. They wanted him dead. They wanted him gone—outta the picture!

This is how the week was looking. On Sunday, Jesus rode down the mountainside of Olivet. On Monday, he walked into the temple in Jerusalem. He overturned the tables of the money changers. On Tuesday, he predicted the destruction of the Temple. On Wednesday he rested. On Thursday, he washed the

disciple's feet and instituted the Lord's Supper as Satan entered into the heart of Judas Iscariot. Later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed . . . . .

Now, let me read and paraphrase some verses from the Passion text from Matthew, chapter 26 . . . . . Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

Jesus was so grieved and so agitated . . . deeply grieved, even to death. He threw his body down on the ground. He prayed. He knew he was headed for a cross. He was making an appeal to his Father and saying, "Is there another way?" . . . . . Jesus, the King is considering looking for a way out—but he doesn't take it. He stays connected to his Father in prayer. The other disciples are sleeping. He goes to them three times. They fall back asleep.

The prayer Jesus prayed was full of grief, anguish, fear, and lots of humanness. Jesus wanted the other disciples with him praying. *He just wanted them there.* Jesus was fully human. We're human. We get a good picture of who we are as humans here. Just like the disciples, we can't wake up. We need support. We don't get it sometimes from people we love, and maybe we don't support a friend who needs us. All the while, Jesus is sweating great drops of blood, and his friends are sleeping . . . . . So, Jesus turns to the one who will always be there—a loyal friend—His Father.

He stays connected. He doesn't like what's happening, but he stays connected. He doesn't give up . . . . . Another friend enters the garden—Judas

Iscariot. He lets Jesus down too. He betrays him. The soldiers and religious men take Jesus away in the middle of the night. Verses 57 through 60 read like this. “Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.”

Then, going on and paraphrasing, Peter betrays him a few minutes later, and the chief priests and the elders confer together about Jesus’ death. Early in the morning Judas realizes what he’s done and hangs himself. Then Pilate releases Barabbas, the soldiers whip Jesus, they strip him and put a crown of thorns on his head. They lead him away to be crucified between 2 criminals. Some mock him while others cry.

Jesus, the King—he begins to feel abandoned by his best friend, his Father. He’s hanging from the cross, feeling unimaginable pain. He draws his body up and slides his back on the coarse wood just to get a breath. He smells and feels his flesh tearing and ripping apart. He feels his back radiating pain throughout his body because the soldiers whipped him so intensely. He’s covered with sweat and blood. The blood runs down the vertical pole and makes a puddle at the bottom.

He listens to his assailants curse him. He forgives them. The spikes they drove through his hands and feet were causing his whole body to burn. He can’t breathe. He stands up on the nail they put through his feet just to get a breath and then slumps back down. His heart feels like bursting. He feels like the weight of the world is resting on the nail they’d pounded through his wrists. He’s so weak.

He doesn't have the strength to pull himself up again, so he takes his last breath and dies.

Then the curtain in the temple is torn, the earth shakes, and the rocks split. Many of the saints are raised from the dead and an earthquake occurs. At that moment maybe some who were watching Jesus trusted their King and were saved from their sin. Others looked from a distance and forgot all about it the next day.

It was a few days filled with high notes when Jesus entered Jerusalem. On Friday, there were somber tones all around. The parade was long over, the disciples gave up, and some wondered if any of this *even made a difference*. They laid his body in a tomb. Pilate set a guard of soldiers to watch over it, and the one who died for the whole world was laid to rest. Jesus died, accused falsely, abandoned, and betrayed by his friends . . . . .

Where are you in all of this? Are you asking yourself, "Does any of this make any difference or is it just a fairytale? Is it true? Religion . . . it isn't a quick fix for our problems. It's not something that relieves our guilt, calms our fears, or makes us feel like a good person. It's not a band-aide or guarantee that ensures a heaven-bound direction when we die. *God has a different way for us*. It's not religion that saves us—its having a relationship with Christ. It's opening up our heart to the one who humbled himself and became obedient unto death *for us*. It's putting our faith and trust in a Savior and serving him throughout the year. Jesus took our place on that cross . . . . . Do you know the one who died for you? Do you think any of this makes any difference at all?

Let's pray. Holy God, move within us today. Quicken our spirits to hear your voice and help us to make a change that will last through eternity. We shout to you Lord, "Hosanna!" Save us. Amen.