

**“The Crux of our Faith”**  
**by Rev. David J. Wood**  
**Palm/Passion Sunday: March 29, 2026**  
**First Congregational Church Camden, Maine**

**First Reading:**

**Luke 19: 41-44**

As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

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So which is it? What exactly is it we recall on Palm Sunday?

A celebratory parade

A protest March

A kind of rehearsal for a funeral procession.

One can make a case for all three.

There are two times in the Gospels when Jesus cries and they are two of the most human moments in the entire story he have of Jesus. One is at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and the other here, on Palm Sunday, as he enters the city of Jerusalem amidst the cheering crowds.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jesus does not respond with abroad smile, or raised arms or a royal wave in acknowledgment of all the recognition that is being showered upon him.

Instead, Luke tells us, “as he came near and the city came into view, he wept over it.”

He wept. He broke down. He was undone.

His tears were not for himself.

His tears were not for the prospect of his own suffering or death.

He wept for the city and its people...  
for what was to come of them...

listen to the words that he speaks through his tears:

"If you, even you, had only recognized on this day, the things that make for peace!"

"If only..."

These have to be two of the saddest, sorrowful words in the english language.

Here we are some 2000 years on and his tears for Jerusalem map all too neatly onto our day and time. Palm Sunday feels much nearer than a distant yesterday.

I don't think it requires a stretch of the imagination to see Jesus weeping as he rides on through the streets and the ruins of Gaza, cities and villages of Ukraine...the Sudan...in Iran...in Lebanon...the terrorizing of those who have come seeking refuge in our own country...

...into almost anywhere in our world and to see him weeping for us.

The truth is, we live in a world that knows all too well the things that make for war...and revenge and retribution. The truth is, it's becoming harder, not easier, to recognize the things that make for peace.

Have you wept lately at the state of our world? If you have, it is because you have not lost your ability to recognize the things that make for peace...  
It means you see the world as it is...and you see what the world is supposed to be...and, at some level, it breaks your heart.

The temptation is to surrender that recognition of the things that make for peace and decide instead that the best we can hope for, no, the only thing we can hope for, is a standoff between warring and hostile powers. It is tempting to conclude that there is no other way.

But then our attention is caught by this mysterious, determined, undaunted figure who refuses to cooperate with our resignation...and in tears, he rides on....and he bids us to follow...to see things through his eyes...to trust that there is another way...things can be and one day will be wholly other.

So with our palms in hand, we join the procession that proceeds down through the ages led by this one we hail as God With Us...who does not march past our human

situation...but into the very heart of it and takes on the powers that empower all evil, the power that perpetrates all this madness we commit against each other...

Let's see where this procession leads us...

## **Second Reading:**

### **Mark 15: 16-41**

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of

the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, who followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him, and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

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The word *crux* is the Latin word for CROSS. Also the root for other words such as:

Crucial

Crisis

Crucible...

All of which in some way are applicable to the cross as we have come to understand it.

Until the Christians did, no Jew or Greek or Roman came up with the idea to attach a positive even religious sense to this ancient gallows reserved for dangerous criminals and the lowest classes of society.

We have very few detailed accounts of crucifixion...The Passion narratives in the Gospels are in fact the most detailed accounts of all. No ancient writer wanted to dwell too long on this cruel procedure.

In all the accounts...the crucifixion of Jesus utterly destroys his community of followers. In and of itself, this narrative of crucifixion provides no larger story – certainly no redemption. On Good Friday, we don't have a redemption story...just a tragic ending.

And yet...

A frightening and brutal execution became a keystone in the good news that Christians celebrated and proclaimed. The earliest Christians came to see the cross as the revelation of a love that would rather die than give up on us.

The cross revealed the lengths to which God will go to renew and restore communion with us even in the face of our bloody rebellion.

The cross is NOT about appeasing Divine wrath.

Or about satisfying a Divine demand for a blood sacrifice...

but about showing us that God does not demand blood for there to be peace...

The story speaks for itself: In the face of this brutal execution of a beloved leader...  
There is no spree of violence, retribution, revenge,  
of setting things aright on behalf of the crucified leader...instead a new odd, counter  
community arises...dedicated to the innocent victim whom God has now raised up.

As the story is told, The one who is sacrificed by Herod and Pilate...  
is raised from the dead...but here's the twist that no one saw coming:

The crucified one does not exact revenge and retribution on those who abandoned him,  
Or on those who persecuted, brutalized, and executed him. Instead he offers a Whole  
new basis for PEACE: His first words are "Peace be with you."  
PEACE is the opposite of what they would expect...And sends them into the world to  
proclaim the forgiveness of sins!  
A peace not as this world gives...that peace is now offered.  
They come to know this one who died as God's chosen One  
who has come to Break the cycle of redemptive violence...

In Christ, God is willing to suffer the worst to deliver us from it...provide a new path to  
peace...

The work of the cross is the work of a transcendent God breaking into a cycle of  
violence we could not break on our own. In Christ we see once and for all the things  
that make for peace.

We are healed, become new creation...  
to live by a different logic...  
love enemies, pray for those who persecute us...forgive...  
renounce violence as a way to peace...

We return again and again to the cross...it is the crux of our faith...  
We refuse to avert our eyes from it

For by it we can face the truth about ourselves...  
The truth about our world...  
The reality of humanity's inhumanity..its brokenness...  
The cross reveals the truth about God who refused to give up on us...

Because of the cross, we refuse to follow those who insist  
That peace can only come by the shedding of blood....

Because of the cross, we refuse to avert our eyes from anyone  
Who suffers the violence of humanity's inhumanity...

The cross...the crux of our faith.

African American pastor, author, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman tells of a trip to India, when he and his wife, Sue, had the honor of meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. After a wonderful conversation, the talk took a surprising turn as the Thurmans prepared to leave.

Thurman notes, "But before we left, he asked, 'Will you do me a favor? Will you sing one of your songs for me? Will you sing "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?'"

He continued, 'I feel that this song gets to the root of the experience of the entire human race under the spread of the healing wings of suffering.'"

Amen.