

Psalm 118:1-2 & 19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

CELEBRATIONS

In recent weeks, around the world at prescribed times people have appeared at their open windows, balconies or front doors to applaud, long and loud, all of the doctors, nurses, technicians, police, firefighters, EMTs and many others who work hard every day, putting their lives on the line, to treat, serve and protect others.

Those who express their enthusiastic thanks never leave the safety of their homes, but they want to be seen and heard for the benefit of the ones they celebrate.

Today the Christian world celebrates the day Jesus entered Jerusalem and received great celebrations from crowds of people who threw their cloaks on the road before him, waved palm fronds at him, and shouted,

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!”

So let *us* shout to heaven, “Blessed are all who come to help others with the love and protective power of the LORD!”

We are grateful!”

Isn't it an ongoing blessing to us,

the way the Psalms praise, thank and worship God?

Sometimes they retell God's great and loving acts of creation,

sometimes they remind us that God is our salvation,

yet sometimes they express anger, disappointment and frustration.

In spite of God's love, there are times when life brings

difficulties and challenges.

There are times when enemies—human or spiritual—

seem to have the upper hand and the Psalmist cries out to God.

Jesus on the cross quoted from Psalm 22:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Feeling that God is ignoring us in our troubles,

we may find it too easy to turn away.

Think of Job's wife who, considering all the terrible things

that had fallen upon him, told him to just “curse God and die!”

But we must not.

We cannot.

He is our Daddy in heaven, our Creator,
the father of our Savior and Lord.

It's true that every day terrible things happen:
more and more people are sick with the virus and
it's a tragedy that more and more people die of it.

Our faith is shaken, especially since there is so little that can be done
to stop it.

I just read a long article by a well-known and highly regarded preacher
and theologian, Walter Brueggemann.

He stunned me with his arguments,
using bits of scripture from the Old Testament,
about God visiting evil on unrighteous people.

It's either a well-deserved punishment or a wake-up call
because there's still time to repent.

Brueggemann concentrates on the punishment.

As I hope you know, I do not agree at all.

Our God is not vengeful; when he punishes people,
it is with justice and love, not with uncontrolled nastiness.

People do that!

And not with evil—God is incapable of doing evil.

That belongs completely to God's and our enemy, Satan.

We must always love God and give thanks for his blessings.

Now our reading from Matthew is a very well-known story,

and of course it's the reason for today's special celebration.

Let's imagine ourselves standing by the gate in Jerusalem,

waving palm branches, applauding Jesus and shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Meanwhile, as he rides through the gate into the city with his crowd,

a great many people are busy asking each other, “Who is this guy?”

And the crowds who came with him reply,

“This is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee; he speaks for God.”

In Luke's gospel, some of the Pharisees—

this should come as no surprise—are irritated by all the hoopla

so they tell Jesus: “Listen, Teacher, order your disciples to stop!”

He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent,

the stones would shout out.”

My, my.

Like water from a rock, praises would shout out from stones!

This celebration and pageantry will soon stop;

Jesus and his disciples have more business to attend to

before they celebrate the Passover, and before Jesus will be arrested,

starting the inevitable journey to the cross.

This is a rather brief moment of great joy,

which will all too soon be overshadowed by politics and heresy.

But we will remember those events together next week

on Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday.

Today let's rejoice with Jesus' faithful disciples and

proclaim that he is blessed, just as he blesses us.

And when we pray, we will pray lovingly for one another,

holding spiritual hands.

Let us pray together, wherever we are:

LORD God, we love and worship you.

We thank you for our Lord and Savior, your Son Jesus,

and for your Holy Spirit who lives within us.

and we count on our Triune God,

especially during these devastating times,

to bless us with continuing faith and health.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.