

**Palm Sunday  
April 10, 2022**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

Palm Sunday. The Blessing of the Palms. The reading of the Passion Gospel. We are at the end of Lent ... the beginning of Holy Week.

Next Sunday is Easter, but before Easter are the events of Jesus in Jerusalem. He overturned the tables in the Temple. He drove out the moneychangers with a whip. He incurred the wrath of the Temple elite. He had his last meal ... a Passover seder ... with his disciples. He was betrayed by one of his own. He was arrested by Temple police. He was presented to the political authorities to be condemned. He was beaten, mocked, and then crucified ... hung on a cross to die. Jesus came to Jerusalem to speak truth to power ... and the powers killed him.

The universal ... and timeless ... question is, why would God allow this to happen to God's son? If Jesus was the Son of a loving God, where was God while all this was happening?

In its infancy, the new Christian Church wrestled with this question. In the fourth century Augustine of Hippo formulated a theory that the Church embrace ... and still embraces today ... Original Sin. Original Sin says that humans ... by their very nature ... are separated from God. Because of our sinful nature ... Saint Augustine proposed ... there is nothing that we humans can do to overcome this separation. Thus, God had to make the sacrifice that we could not ... that we cannot make. God sacrificed the life of God's Son Jesus. This is called Substitutional Sacrifice. It was a solution to the problem ... it was an answer to the question.

As I preached on Ash Wednesday, and the First Sunday of Lent, I do not believe in the theology of Original Sin. Nor do I believe in the theology of Substitutional Sacrifice. Instead, I believe in Original Blessing ... that the whole world was created in blessing ... and all creatures ... including all of us ... were created in blessing ... we were born in goodness, for goodness.

So, we still face a question ... if we are created in Original Blessing, why does God allow for the pain and suffering ... the anguish and sorrow ... the agony and torture of this broken world? And, what are we to do about sin in our world ... and in our personal lives? On this Palm Sunday, when we celebrate with song and the waving of palm branches Jesus "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem, why do we listen to the story of Jesus' agony and death by crucifixion? If God was with Jesus as he entered the holy city, where was God when Jesus hung on the cross?

Original Blessing means that we are always and steadfastly in relationship to God ... not separated from God. Original Blessing reminds us that we are called *good*, and *beloved*, before

anything else. Sin is not at the heart of our relationship with God ... *blessing* is. We are blessed children of God born in *goodness* ... for *goodness*.

Substitutional Sacrifice ... “Jesus died for our sins” ... solves the problem of Original Sin. On the other hand, Original Blessing is an invitation to participate in God’s blessing of this Creation ... and everything in this Creation ... from the stewardship of the resources of the earth, to the way we treat every living thing, including each other.

The world we live in is a complicated place ... full of the good, the bad, and the ugly. However, God is with us, and God sticks with us, even in the worst of times. That is the essence of the stories we hear in the Bible. Even when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and were expelled from the Garden, God was there with animal skins to cover what they were now ashamed of. The broken world of Noah’s time was flooded, but then came the rainbow. The Israelites were oppressed under Pharaoh, but God was with them in the Exodus. Facing hunger and thirst in the wilderness, God was with the Israelites with manna and water from a rock. When Jerusalem was ravaged and the Temple destroyed by the Assyrians, and the Jews exiled to Babylon, God was still with the tribe of Israelites. Even in a terribly broken world, God hung on in God’s relationship with the Creation and people who were born in goodness for goodness.

Then, along came Jesus. Like every other human being before and after, Jesus was born in Original Blessing ... he was born in goodness for goodness. Somehow, Jesus knew that divine blessing in an amazingly deep sense, and he sought to find out what it meant. He went to John the Baptist and was awakened to that blessing in a profound way ... Jesus knew the fullness of that blessing when he came up out of the water. He knew then that God was alive in him, and he was alive in God. Then ... like his spiritual ancestors ... he went into the wilderness of a broken world ... and God was with him ... always with him.

Jesus lived the original blessings so intensely that when people saw him ... and the things he did ... they knew they were seeing God. Because Jesus fully lived his Original Blessing he saw every other human being as a fellow child of God who was also born of Original Blessing ... even if they were not as aware of it as he was. Regardless of the status of the person ... or their ability or disability ... or from whom they were included or excluded ... Jesus saw them as full of God’s blessing. He treated them all as blessed children of a loving God. And, those who were hindered by disability ... the lame, the deaf, the blind, the ill, the demon possessed ... he opened a path for them to realize they were also blessed ... they were born in goodness for goodness ... and in that realization their souls were healed.

Yet, in a broken world ... a world built of us and them ... a world of people at the top and others at the bottom ... this kind of trust and confidence of being a child of Original Blessing was a threat to the status quo. To the Pharisee, one could only be blessed if you were “pure,” and you strictly adhered to the Law. To the Temple elite, who depended upon a commerce of selling sacrificial animals, an egalitarian worldview shattered their economy. To the political leaders of a Roman patronage system, Jesus exposed their authoritarian governmental

structure as flawed. Just by acting on his Original Blessing in God's name, Jesus spoke truth to power ... and he was crucified for it.

Jesus died because of a broken world. The Church says he "died for our sins." The Church then ... and the Church today ... says Jesus died as a substitutional sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

I do not believe that theology. I am old enough that I don't have a whole lot of time left to say all that I would like to say, so I might as well say it. I believe Jesus died because of the sins of humanity ... the sins of a broken world where people at the top needed people at the bottom to exploit ... and Jesus threatened that system. That is why Jesus was crucified ... he spoke truth to power.

Jesus still threatens that system. Crucifixion in the time of Jesus was a way to control the masses by the threat of death if you stepped out of line. The roads into Jerusalem were lined with the crosses of those who were crucified to remind people of the power of the state to control through intimidation.

And people are still being crucified today. The bodies of executed civilians left in the streets in Ukraine are meant to intimidate the population to keep people from speaking the truth. The disproportionate killing of young Black men in this country is a form of lynching ... lynching used to intimidate a racial minority and keep them voiceless. Just ask a Black parent what they have to tell their sons about "driving while Black." A "Don't Say Gay" bill that leaves gays, lesbians, transgender, and non-binary youth vulnerable to suicide is a form of crucifixion ... keep it to yourself, or else.

Crucifixion was the implement of intimidation that the Romans used in the time of Jesus. Jesus died a horrible death for speaking truth about his broken world.

However, there is actually good news in this story.

We live in a broken world, just as Jesus did. In the midst of his broken world Jesus knew the fullness of God's blessing. God was alive in Jesus, and Jesus was alive in God. That trust and confidence was so complete, that even in the face of a brutal death, Jesus knew God was with him even to his last breath.

We, too, live in a broken world. A horrible, unnecessary war in Ukraine ... and Yemen ... and Syria. Oppression of minority populations around the world. Human fueled famines. Culture wars that leave vulnerable people open to ridicule with little resources to alleviate suffering.

And then there is the broken world of our own lives ... life-threatening illnesses, problems in our relationships with each other, concerns over children and their emotional and mental health, and the list goes on ... and on ... and on.

Just remember, like Jesus, you are a child of Original Blessing. God lives in you, and you live in God. You were created in goodness, for goodness. During the events of Holy Week, Jesus knew more fully than we can ever know that God was alive in him, and he was alive in God. This was true even unto his death. In the midst of whatever suffering we face in our broken world today ... whether it is the world out there, or in our own personal worlds ... remember that you are a blessed child of God. Remember that God is alive in you, and you are alive in God. You are a child of Original Blessing ... born of goodness, for goodness.

Our Lenten season is ending. Holy Week is about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem ... his Triumphal Entry into the city, and his actions of disgust of the business of the Temple. He spoke truth to power and he paid with his life for it. But, he knew what he was willing to die for. And he knew that God who blessed him at his creation ... the God of Original Blessing ... was with him in his suffering and his death.

There is a theory presented by some scholars about the name of God ... Yahweh. In ancient Hebrew Yahweh did not have any vowels ... it was spelled YH WH. It was the sound of breath ... breathe in and one hears YH. Breathe out and one hears WH. Jesus last breath was the name of God.

That is the story of the Passion ... Jesus's Passion ... and our Passion today. Remember, you are a child of Original Blessing. You were born of goodness ... for goodness. We live in a broken world, but God is alive in each one of us, just as God was alive in Jesus. And we are alive in God, just as Jesus was alive in God. Yes, we live in a broken world, but Original Blessings says that God is in this world with us, just as he was with Jesus.

Amen.