

Hope In The Midst Of Darkness
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VIRTUAL WORSHIP VERSION
April 5, 2020 - Year A – Palm/Passion Sunday
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Ontario, CA
Matthew 21:1-11

If you were a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, this Sunday seemed like the day you'd been waiting for. Jesus was riding into Jerusalem. He was getting a king's welcome. The people were acclaiming him as "the Son of David." He was being called "prophet."

So, imagine how you would have felt when, just a few days later, Jesus was arrested, put on trial, denounced by the very multitude which had hailed him, and then executed on a cross.

Next Sunday, the Good News will be affirmed. Jesus Christ will be resurrected. That will be our day of vindication, our day of triumph.

But there's all this messy stuff we have to go through first. In the space of five short days, Holy Week goes from giddy joyfulness and celebration to shock and mourning. This was one massive 180-degree flip in circumstances. That fast, it went from as good as it could possibly get to as gutwrenchingly painful as it could possibly be.

Have we all had a somewhat similar experience in the last few weeks? I know I have. Let's go back to a month ago today. March 5. I have to keep a pretty detailed calendar of all my daily activities and appointments, so I can reconstruct it pretty clearly in my head. We all knew that there was a virus called "coronavirus" and we all knew that it might be a problem. Many of us were performing heightened sanitary practices but I don't think anybody outside of the Center For Disease Control and the World Health Organization had any real idea what was about to hit. I remember March 5. It was a pretty good day for me.

Fast-forward a month. We're all living in quarantine. We cannot even gather together in person to worship. Many of us are facing financial hardship and uncertainty. Things went from real good to real bad real fast. And we still have no clear idea of when things might get better.

Multiply those feelings of anxiety, dread and helplessness by about a thousand, and that's what you would have been feeling on the day that Jesus was crucified. The bright, golden, shining world you lived in on Palm Sunday was utterly destroyed on Good Friday.

And then came Easter Sunday . . .

People often ask me if I can sum up Christianity in one word. I don't hesitate with my answer: Hope. And I mean realistic Hope, not Hope tied to some fleeting fantasy of Utopia but a Hope that acknowledges everything bad, evil or sorrowful in the world and can still say: "Something better is coming."

And that "something better" has many dimensions. We can take the longer grand view of Christ's promised return and find Hope. We can look to the more limited horizon of our present circumstances and find Hope that this too shall pass.

Holy Week incorporates Hope in all of its dimensions. Right now, we are literally in Holy Week, as defined by the calendar, but the entire human race is figuratively in Holy Week as it seeks to live out the COVID-19 pandemic. We don't even know if we're to the Good Friday part just yet. But we do know that we can hold on to Hope. As bad as things can get, as dark as the world may seem at times, they do always get better. Those who can persevere in the darkness are the ones who will bathe most joyfully in the warmth of the light.

Next Sunday, we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We know that, and that is an advantage we have over the disciples, whose entire world seemed to crumble on the first Good

Friday. Just as future historians will someday have an advantage over us and will be able to place COVID-19 in a perspective that we just can't see yet.

Hang in there, friends. Keep hold of Hope. You don't have to live in denial of reality, you just need to have Hope that the present reality will be replaced by another reality, the reality of a world free from this pandemic and all other pandemics. I'm not making that promise. God made that promise through the person of Jesus Christ. And I can't imagine a surer foundation for Hope.