



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

April 14, 2019 - Palm Sunday

"His Sorrow Is Splendor" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

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Good morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

Happy Palm Sunday! Today is a joyous day in the life of the church all around the world. I love that we start this service every year with children waving palm fronds and singing, "Hosanna!"

On Palm Sunday, we celebrate a triumphant Jesus, as He enters Jerusalem the week before Easter, the crowds yelling, "Hosanna!" Hosanna means, "Save Us!"

We've been walking with Jesus in our Hope Restored sermon series for more than a year, going verse by verse through the entire gospel of Mark. So we already looked at the Palm Sunday passage in November, at the start of Advent.

Our scripture today from the book of Mark is a different passage, which happens a few days after Palm Sunday and a few days before Easter. Our verses today happens right after Barabbas is released to the crowd and right before Jesus' crucifixion.

Before we read our passage today from the gospel of Mark, I want to put it in context. And the context is not just the few verses before or after. I want to locate our passage today in a much bigger context: an eternal context.

And for that I want to read a few verses from the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. The author John, has a vision of Jesus in eternity as the true and triumphant King, being worshipped by all creation. What we saw this morning with the waving of palm branches and worship of Jesus is just a tiny taste of the reality of the eternal Kingdom of God.

Let's read from the book of Revelation 5:11-14. The author John writes about Jesus, who is the Lamb of God:

***11** Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, **12** singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

***13** Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!...And the elders fell down and worshiped."*

That is the context for our passage in Mark today. Jesus, the true and triumphant king, with all of creation bowing before Him and worshipping His name. All creation declaring that Jesus is worthy to receive: power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, for ever and ever, Amen!

Okay, so that is the context for today's passage: Jesus in all His glory.

As always, as we go through our passage and message today, ask yourself these two questions: 1. What is God saying to me? 2. What does He want me to do about it?

Let's read our verses today from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 15, verses 15 to 21.

***15** So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed Jesus over to be crucified. **16** Then the soldiers led Jesus into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters). And they called together the whole company of soldiers. **17** And they clothed Him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on Him. **18** And they began saluting Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

19 *They struck His head with a reed, spat upon Him, and knelt down in homage to Him. 20 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. 21 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God!

Please be seated, and please join me in prayer.

Jesus, You are beautiful, in Your glory and in Your suffering. May You reveal Yourself to us now. May we see Your glory, Your beauty, Your love for us. We invite Your Holy Spirit to transform us. May we have an encounter with You now. In Your name, we pray, and all God's children say, Amen.

What a contrast! In Revelation, Jesus the true and triumphant King, being worshipped by all creation for all eternity! And that same Jesus, here in our passage today, suffering, being mocked by a crowd of soldiers, beaten, and spit upon.

What a contrast. As we sang, Jesus, who is both the Lion and the Lamb.

When I was reflecting on today's passage, all I could think about was how BEAUTIFUL Jesus is, and so that's what we'll be looking at today. I hope we all encounter Jesus today and see how beautiful He is.

Our sermon title today is "His Sorrow is Splendor."

This is a fitting passage for today, Palm Sunday. This week is Holy Week, culminating next Sunday with Easter Sunday. We

hope that you'll be here again next week to celebrate with us.

And if you only think about Jesus on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, you get a very triumphant and glorious picture of Jesus and the church.

Today, waving palm branches, singing Hosanna! When you come back next week on Easter Sunday: Jesus, risen from the dead! Resurrection and new life!

But this glorious picture of celebration is not the complete picture of Jesus and the gospel. This Friday is Good Friday, the day on which Jesus is crucified.

Pastor Tim Shaw has been organizing our Maundy Thursday service for the last few years. It is a Tenebrae service, or a service of darkness. It's a service that reflects on Jesus' crucifixion with testimonies from a number of people, songs, and the progressive darkening of the sanctuary, extinguishing candles as we move through the events of Jesus' crucifixion, until the service ends in complete darkness.

I know that a weekday evening service doesn't fit into everyone's schedule. So, this isn't about the Maundy Thursday service. It's about whether we take time this week to reflect upon the suffering and death of Jesus. Pastor Tim has said that when go only from Palm Sunday straight to Easter Sunday, we miss something very important. We go straight from high point to high point, and the gospel of Jesus Christ and the life of a follower of Jesus is not just a journey from high point to high point.

Between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, is the cross. Between the high points, is the suffering and death and sacrifice

of Jesus on a cross, for us. The gospel is glorious highs and lots of celebration. But it also is very realistic about the reality of suffering.

I know that there are many people here today, who are in a place of great suffering. And all of us at one point in our past or future will experience suffering. You might have wondered in the past, or you might be wondering right now: "Where is God in the midst of my suffering?" And so hear these words of encouragement, the truth of Hope Restored: God knows and sees and understands your suffering. God is present is your suffering.

An author once wrote: "God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers."

So let's walk through our passage today, and see Jesus.

15 *So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed Jesus over to be crucified.*

In verse 15, as Pastor Dan covered last week, Pilate has released Barabbas to the crowd and has turned Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

The first thing I want us to notice is that Jesus is turned over to the soldiers, AFTER He has already been flogged. Pilate's sentence was for Jesus to be beaten and crucified. Jesus has already been beaten in verse 15, before He is turned over to the soldiers.

So everything we read in our passage today is not part of the judicial sentence. This is not the soldiers doing their job, following orders, to beat Jesus. Jesus has already been flogged.

What we read today is entirely superfluous cruelty. It is unnecessarily extra. It is not needed for anything, except to be cruel.

16 *Then the soldiers led Jesus into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole company of soldiers.*

In verse 16, the soldiers lead Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's palace, and they call together the whole company of soldiers. A company of Roman soldiers was 1/10 of a legion. A legion of soldiers was approximately 5,000 or 6,000 soldiers. So this group of Roman soldiers mocking Jesus is maybe 500 or 600 soldiers large.

These 500 soldiers mocking Jesus—their cruelty is not just superfluous. It is remarkably creative.

17 *And they clothed Him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on Him.*

These soldiers go to great lengths and lots of effort to be mean. They could've just been mean. They could've just been extra mean. These soldiers, they take their cruelty and contempt to a whole different level. They decide to be CREATIVELY mean. These soldiers are mean like the bullies in those movies about high school, like Mean Girls or Karate Kid, when you watch appalled and think, "How can they be so mean?"

The soldiers put a purple cloak on Jesus, signifying royalty, and then they put a crown of thorns on His head.

When we discussed this passage with our staff this week, Jenny Sung said, about the crown

of thorns: "That's a lot of work." And it's true. No one just has a crown of thorns sitting around. It's takes a lot of deliberate work to make a crown of thorns. I'm not a very craft-y person. I'm not good at knitting or quilting, or making jewelry. If you are, we have a crafting group that meets here on Friday mornings, you're welcome to join them.

But at least one of these soldiers had to sit there and take the time to weave and twist strands of thorns together, getting poked, maybe bleeding, just so they could be extra, unnecessarily, deliberately, creatively cruel to Jesus.

Can I take five seconds for a Public Service Announcement: Please don't be a bully. I just found out on Friday that our friend's 11 year old kid's classmates made a fake Instagram page to bully him. That breaks my heart. That is creatively cruel. Two thousand years ago and right now, people will always find a way to be cruel. So for your kids, your grandkids, or yourself: Please don't be a bully.

18 *And they began saluting Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

19 *They struck His head with a reed, spat upon Him, and knelt down in homage to Him.*

What are the visual markers of royalty? A crown, a purple robe, and a scepter. And that is what is that reed signifies in verse 19. This reed is not a long willowy piece of grass. This reed is more like a hard piece of bamboo. It is possibly a cane, or given that this is a group of soldiers, it could have been the shaft of an arrow. The soldiers beat Jesus with it, spit on Him, and then kneel in front of Him.

Can you picture this scene? Jesus is being humiliated,

dehumanized, mocked. Jesus, the eternal King, worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, for ever and ever. Instead, Jesus receives violence, cruelty, spit, insult, contempt, mockery, brutality.

What a contrast. Not just the contrast of Jesus, worthy of worship but receiving contempt. What a contrast from the Jesus that we have walked with for the past year and a half in the gospel of Mark.

We have seen Jesus in every interaction throughout the gospel of Mark actively and powerful transforming every situation He has been in. He raises a dead girl to life, He walks on water, He feeds 5000, He challenges the religious authorities, He heals lepers, and the blind and the bleeding. He is an active agent of transformation in the world.

Except in our passage today. Jesus passively receives this cruelty. Because Jesus is not just the King coming on the clouds and the Lion roaring with power, as we sang. Jesus is the Lion...and the Lamb. The Lamb that was slain for us.

20 *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.*

And then the soldiers put Jesus' clothes back on Him. I love that detail. The soldiers dress Jesus up like a king to mock Him. They give Him a crown, and a cloak and a scepter. But that's not Jesus. He enters this scene wearing His own clothes and leaves wearing His own clothes. Jesus wears the clothes of a humble, traveling rabbi.

Remember that passage from Revelation—Jesus worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, for ever and ever. That vision isn't of all creation bowing down to worship a king who is worthy, a king with a crown and a robe and a scepter. It's not even a vision of all creation bowing down to worship a lion.

Look again at Revelation 5:12: *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

All creation is bowing down to the LAMB who is worthy. Jesus is a king and a lion. But all creation worships Jesus, the LAMB that was slain.

A few years back there was a movie called, "The Passion of the Christ" that depicts the brutal cruelty endured by Jesus. There's a picture from the set of the movie with the director speaking with the actor playing Jesus. Be warned, I'm going to show a picture that shows the actor playing Jesus looking very bloody.

Here's that picture. You can see the brutality endured by Jesus depicted here. I show the picture not to shock you with the bloodiness, but because some internet wise guy put a caption on the picture that I think is hilarious and very true.



That moment when you try to explain to Jesus how hard your life has been lately.

"Jesus, both the Pali and the Likelike were closed this morning! Can you believe it? Jesus, my co-worker is soooo annoying. Jesus, I've been fasting for Lent for five weeks—I haven't had any cake for soooo long."

I don't mean to belittle the real challenges that you're going through. (I'm just belittling the small things!) Pali closure aside, there is real and profound suffering in our world and in our congregation. And I'm definitely not saying that Jesus doesn't care about your suffering or problems. In fact, I'm saying just the opposite.

We don't serve a God who is far away and unconcerned with our suffering and pain. We don't have to search for our God up on the top of a tall mountain, like some guru, where He is hidden away from the common people and their pain. Jesus knows and sees and is present in your suffering. Jesus understands your suffering more profoundly than anyone else who has ever lived. Because He has suffered more profoundly than anyone else who has ever lived. Our God is not only the God of the sufferers, but the God who suffers.

Jesus, in our passage today, is never more fully human. Enduring contempt, and spite and cruelty. And Jesus, in this moment, is never more fully divine. Because remember: Jesus chooses this.

Jesus chooses to endure all this unnecessary, brutal, creative cruelty, for us. Jesus could have called an army of angels to rescue Him, to wipe out every soldier. But He doesn't. He accepts this suffering on our behalf. And He accepts this suffering not just for us, but for every one of those 500 soldiers there that day.

Jesus loves every one of those soldiers; He loves every one of us in this room today; He loves every single person on this island and He loves every single person on this planet. And that's why Jesus endures this suffering for us. Because He loves us.

John Calvin says that Jesus suffers this disgrace on earth, so that we might have favor in heaven, and to restore in us the image of God.

I mentioned earlier that when I reflected on this passage, I was overcome by how beautiful Jesus is. Jesus, beaten and battered and bruised, is beautiful. The God of the universe suffers with us and like us and FOR us. And that is beautiful.

My favorite professor in college was Nicholas Wolterstorff. He's a philosophy professor, the smartest person I've ever met, and a faithful Christian. Professor Wolterstorff's eldest son Eric was an avid mountain climber. When Eric was 25, he went climbing, slipped and fell to his death.

To process his overwhelming grief, Professor Wolterstorff wrote fragmented reflections on his grief, his loss, his suffering, his struggle with God and struggle to make sense of his son's death. Those fragmented reflections were later published as a book titled *Lament for a Son*. That's who wrote the line: "God is not only the God of the sufferers, but the God who suffers."

Professor Wolterstorff also wrote the following in *Lament for a Son*, which has stuck with me for more than 20 years since I first read it. He writes: "It is said of God that no one can behold His face and live."

I always thought this meant that no one could see His splendor and live. A friend said perhaps it meant that no one could see His sorrow and live. Or perhaps His sorrow is splendor.

“And the great mystery: to redeem our brokenness and lovelessness, the God who suffers with us did not strike some mighty blow of power but sent His beloved Son to suffer like us, through His suffering to redeem us from suffering and evil. Instead of explaining our suffering, God shares it.” (*Nicholas Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son*)

Perhaps His sorrow is Splendor. Jesus is beautiful. And He is beautiful not just in His glory. Jesus is beautiful in His suffering. In His suffering, He shares WITH us and LIKE us and FOR us.

Can we take a moment now in silence to just pause and reflect and pray. Take this moment to silently pray and meet Jesus now, however you feel comfortable.

[Time of silent prayer]

Amen. Our hope when you come on Sunday mornings is that you might encounter Jesus. It's not so you learn some interesting facts about the Bible, or learn how to be a better person. We want you to meet Jesus. To see His face. To become more aware of being in the presence of God. Not just here, but out there, and all throughout the week. Because that encounter will change you, and the people around you.

And so there's one last verse in our passage today: **21** *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.*

Our prayer at the start of the sermon was that we might have an encounter with Jesus. That we might see His beauty and His suffering.

Simon from Cyrene, has a brief encounter with Jesus. Involuntarily. And Simon meets Jesus not when Jesus is teaching, or performing a miracle. Simon encounters Jesus, for just a few moments, as Jesus is suffering. And it changes Simon's life forever. And not just Simon's life, but the life of his entire family. How do we know this?

Why does our author Mark identify Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus? For the same reason I introduce myself as KG and Isaac's dad when I'm at my kids' school. The people at their school know them; they don't know me.

Mark writes his gospel 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection to Christians living in Rome. And so Mark likely mentions Rufus and Alexander because those Christians in Rome probably knew Rufus and Alexander. In fact, in Paul's letter to the Roman church, in Chapter 16, Paul sends his greetings to a man named Rufus, who he says is chosen in the Lord, and his mother.

Simon is from Cyrene, which is in North Africa. He may have been in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and gets dragged into carrying Jesus' cross. Simon meets Jesus in Jerusalem, and because of that encounter, one generation later, his children are followers of Jesus in Rome. Simon from North Africa, meets Jesus in Jerusalem, his children follow Jesus in Rome. Simon's encounter with Jesus changes multiple generations and multiple countries, because Simon

came face to face with Jesus, saw His beauty, even in suffering, and eventually grasped the most beautiful thing Jesus did, was to lay down His life for others.

Just like Simon of Cyrene, don't underestimate the power of a brief encounter with Jesus to change your life forever. Of course, the story doesn't end with Jesus suffering, or dying on a cross. Jesus is not dead. He is alive. He is risen! But for that, you have to come back next week for Easter.

We'll sing a song together in moment, about seeing the face of Jesus, Who is beautiful. As the worship team comes up, let's take another moment to silently pray and reflect, to encounter Jesus, Who is beautiful.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio & video recordings of sermons, are also available at fpchawaii.org by clicking the eSermons tab.