

## *WHAT CAN SAVE US NOW?*

Psalm 118.24-29 (Mark 11.1-10)

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### **Mark 11.1-10**

#### **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna!

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

### **Psalm 118.24-29**

This is the day that the Lord has made;

**We will rejoice and be glad in it.**

Save us, we pray, we beg you!

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**We bless you from this house of God.**

The Lord is God and has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches.

**You are my God and I will give you thanks.**

**You are my God and I will pray you.**

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good  
and God's steadfast love endures forever.

## WHAT CAN SAVE US NOW?

*“Grant us peace in our time;  
there is no other who can help us.”*

I find myself asking this morning: If thoughts and prayers are not enough, who or what can save us now?

When Father Mike Raschko, the professor over there at Seattle University, began his commentary on the Psalm Sunday section of Mark, he started with the words of Isaiah which imagine God saying:  
*I cannot endure your solemn assemblies ...*

*your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.*

*When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen:  
your hands are full of blood.*

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil you are doing from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow. [Isaiah 1.11-17]*

If you are looking for a biblical passage to support “thoughts and prayers are not enough,” this would be it.

After the March for Our Lives yesterday, after we felt good about the crowd and the cool signs and reconnections with friends, Sara Tollefson handed us a “To Do” list. She was taking a page right out of Isaiah that it’s not enough to pray or to march, “seek justice and learn *to do* good.” So, here’s the “to do” list:

- Ban the purchase and sale of “assault” or semi-automatic rifles;
- Ban the sale of any accessories designed to increase a gun’s rate of fire;
- Call on members of Congress and corporations to stop accepting donations from the NRA;
- Ensure safety in our school system without the use of firearms (no arming teachers ever);
- Raise the age to possess a firearm from 18 to 21 in the state of Washington;
- Implement universal background checks;
- Eliminate private gun sale loopholes;
- Allow funding for thorough gun research;
- [and] Support and fund prevention, intervention, and community re-entry programs that reduce community gun violence.

Thoughts and prayers are not enough. Isaiah and Sara remind us that we have a “to do” list. God help us!

And with all that needs to be done, let me start by saying that I think one of the things we have to do is to confess that we *need* to be saved. I know. Needing to “be saved” has a lot of really bad theological baggage attached to it. But just to be clear, when we sing “Hosanna!” we aren’t offering praise. That’s not the word for triumph. That’s “Hallelujah!”

When we say, “Hosanna!” we are speaking Greek. We are using a Greek version of a Hebrew word that means, “Save us!” It’s the words from Psalm 118: “Save us, we pray, we beg you!”

And I think this is important because sometimes in our privilege we don’t really want to be saved. We are comfortable with our lives. We are ok with the status quo. We don’t want to believe that we need anything or anyone.

Beloved, the ongoing slaughter of our children and people of color should convince us that we need to be saved.

Something is wrong. Thoughts and prayers won't save us. Marches alone won't save us. Ask anyone who has been part of a recovery program and they will tell you that what can save us now is, first, to admit that we need to be saved. That we cannot settle for the status quo. That we need help. We need the spirit and the energy to seek justice and to learn to do what is good. We need the zeal of those young people who say "enough!" We need to join that first Palm Sunday crowd this morning and cry out: "Hosanna!"

On that first Palm Sunday, the crowd was singing Psalm 118 as the prelude to Passover, remembering the stories of their liberation from slavery and the promise of a new way of being together as a people.

And Jesus knew what was going on. Mary Ann Tolbert says that there are two sections of the gospel of Mark. In the first ten chapters, Jesus keeps telling people be quiet, to not tell anyone who he is or what he is doing. And then everything changes in Mark 11.

This whole little side story about going to get the colt is a signal that Jesus is intentionally playing into the messianic hopes of the people. The prophet Zechariah had imagined just such a day when a new kind of king would come riding into Jerusalem on a colt. And there he was.

Tolbert says: "Beginning with Mark 11, secrecy, hiddenness, lonely places, and commands to silence are all things of the past."

That's why yesterday's march was so important. The march itself will not save us. But breaking the silence, raising our voices, showing up for those young people who have had enough of the killing fields that are our schools will at least head us in the right direction.

Will speaking out save us?

We can't see that yet. But, as the great Audre Lorde said:

*Your silence will not protect – will not save – you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences.*

Speaking out may not always save you. But silence definitely will not.

And it may be in speaking, like Audre Lorde says, that you find the words to fit a world you believe in and that can build a bridge to connect us in all our differences.

We cannot forget that the first Palm Sunday was a march. And that Jesus moved through the crowd in this intentionally provocative way that made people cry out their own truth together: “Hosanna! Save us!” which is part plea and part hope and a bridge between all kinds of people who may have thought, until then, that they were alone in their frustration and pain and anger and need.

You may remember when the Cuban-American poet, Richard Blanco, was here with us for Homecoming four years ago or so. He said he never really knew how he came to be the inaugural poet for President Obama's second inauguration – this young gay Latino guy. He says that he would take “mental breaks” when he was at his “wit's end” about what to write and he would watch recorded episodes of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Bewitched*, and his favorite, *The Brady Bunch*, “... as I always have, still addicted to that yesteryear version of America.” *Then the news of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary broke – another one of those moments I instantly knew would live inside of me – inside of us – forever ... And I realized that, in addition to my parents' story [of Cuban exile], there was another story I had been born into – the story of America – ... Not the imaginary America on TV but the real, real American family I belonged to through the Sandy Hook tragedy, those parents and children that our entire country wanted to hold and*

*comfort ... I began asking questions of myself and our country that I had never before dared to ask or explore.*

And so, realizing this deep connection, he wrote. And on that cold day in January, Richard Blanco read:

*One sun rose on us today ...*

*My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,  
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day...  
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives –  
to teach geometry, or ring up groceries as my mother did  
for twenty years, so I could write this poem for us today.*

*All of us as vital as the one light we move through,  
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:  
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,  
the "I have a dream" we keep dreaming,  
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain  
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent  
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light  
breathing color into stained glass windows,  
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth  
onto the steps of our museums and park benches  
as mothers watch children slide into the day ...*

*One ground ...*

*One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes  
tired from work ...*

*We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight  
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always, always  
home, always under one sky, our sky. And always  
one moon like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop  
and every window, of one country – all of us –  
facing the stars. Hope – a new constellation waiting  
for us to map it, waiting for us to name it – together.*

Perhaps what can save us now is part plea and part hope if we can find a way together to break the silence of that impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain those twenty empty desks of children marked absent today, and forever; to move together in that one light that falls on blackboards and lights up this stained glass and fills that one sky above us all with starlight.

There is a story I hold on to. It's a story Rebecca Ann Parker tells about her own life in *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*. Like her, I have been liberated by a faith that together we can change the world. And, like her, I come up against my own helplessness – the inability to “fix” things.

She tells a story about being broken and stuck and about one night just having enough. She walked from her house in Wallingford down toward Lake Union where she would end it all. But she noticed some barrier she hadn't seen before. And as she got closer she says:

*... it was a line of human beings, hunched over some strange-looking, spindly equipment ... It was the Seattle Astronomy Club. There they were with their homemade Heathkit telescopes and their top-of-the-line Sharper Image telescopes, dressed in their Gore-Tex back-country gear and tennis shoes. A whole club of amateur scientists, up and alert in the middle of the night because the sky was clear and the planets were near.*

*To make my way to my death, I had to get past and enthusiast in tennis shoes. He assumed I had come to look at the stars. “Here. Let me show you,” he said, and began to explain the star cluster his telescope was focused on. I had to brush the tears from my eyes to look through his telescope. There it was! A red-orange spiral galaxy. Then he focused it on Jupiter, and I peered through to see the giant, glowing planet. I could not bring myself to continue my journey. In a world where people get up in the middle of the night to look at the stars, I could not end my life.*

*I know there is grace, because my life was saved by the Seattle Astronomy Club ...*

*I was saved by being met, right in the center of the pathway of my despair, by one – actually one hundred – who wouldn't let me go that way. I was saved by the stars themselves, by the cool green grass under my feet, by the earth, the cosmos, its presence, which won me over and persuaded me to stay ... We must open ourselves to the possibility that there are sources beyond ourselves that sustain us, transform us, save us, that hold us tight in the arms of life.*

Beloved, what can save us now is first to admit that we need to be saved. That something is really wrong, that thoughts and prayers alone will not fix.

We need to do something, not because we can fix everything, but because, in doing something, we break the silence and discover that we are not alone.

What can save us now is part plea and part hope. It's the voices of our ancestors singing "Hosanna" or "We shall overcome" in the confidence that there is power already at work within us – that same power that fills the night sky with light – that same power already at work within us to accomplish far more than any of us can ask or imagine.

What can save us now is a voice that can open us up to the possibilities that are all around us if today you hear that voice, and do not harden your hearts.

NOTES:

Michael B. Raschko, *A Companion to the Gospel of Mark* (Twenty-Third Publications, 2003), p. 118. Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World In Literary-Historical Perspective* (Fortress Press, 1996), p.119. Audre Lorde, from *The Cancer Journals*, quote at [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com). Richard Blanco, *For All Of Us, One Today: An Inaugural Poet's Journey* (Beacon Press, 2013), pp. 28-29 and 87-92. Rebecca Ann Parker, *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now* (Skinner House Books, 2006), pp. 107-111.