

Sermon for March 29, 2026
Palm/Passion Sunday
"Why!?"

Matthew 27:15-23

Palm Sunday 30 AD. Jesus and his disciples ended their long journey to Jerusalem. Along the way Jesus healed people and taught at length about the Kingdom that was to come, and people believed. They believed his words of grace and truth. They believed that the miracles he worked were from God above. They believed in him and hoped that he was the Messiah who had come from God to save them.

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, he didn't disappoint the crowds. He acquired a donkey and rode into town just as the prophets had said the Messiah would, and the people responded in kind. They turned that little pony ride into a great victory parade. They sang and chanted, "Hosanna" which is a shout of joy which means "Save us!" Other people heard the commotion and said, "Who is this?" Jesus' followers replied, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth."

That is how it should be! Jesus riding in humility, but at the same time being praised and blessed. We Christians know the joy and blessing of worshipping and glorifying Jesus, and we long to hear the crowds of our day shout "Save us" to Jesus. We want them to know the joy of worshipping Jesus.

Palm Sunday morning, 30 A.D.

I don't need to tell you what happened the following Friday. The prophets had foretold it hundreds of years before. Isaiah spoke of how God's servant must suffer. John the Baptist had called Jesus the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." How does a lamb take away sins? By being sacrificed of course. Jesus had told Nicodemus, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up," on a cross of course. Even Jesus had warned his disciples that he must suffer and die.

But the way it all happened is what is so shocking. If bad men had just grabbed Jesus from the crowds and shot him or something, it might have been easier to take, but it was his own followers who betrayed him. First the disciples would not stay awake with him. Then Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Even Peter denied him! The last straw was the crowd. They had cried "Hosanna!" on Sunday, but now on Friday they shouted "Crucify!"

Pilot, public servant of the Roman Republic, did as they wished. Pilot had tried to get Jesus freed peacefully, but to avoid a riot, he gave in. They nailed Jesus to a cross. His body was broken, and his blood was shed, and he died for our sins.

Why? Why did that happen? There are a lot of answers that could be given. You are probably thinking of them now. "Jesus died because humans, when given a choice between sin and righteousness, chose sin." "Jesus died because we could not repay God for our sins, so God gave us his Son to atone for our evil." "The crowds turned on Jesus because they had misunderstood the kind of Messiah he was." "Jesus died because he loved us enough to give himself for our salvation."

Those are all good answers. They are all theologically and historically accurate, but they miss the point of the question. They are answers to all the little "whys?" I am asking a different question.

You see Jesus was the last person who should have been on that cross. Pilot should

have been there. Judas should have been there. The crowds should have been there. Even the disciples should have been there. All of us should have been there, not him. All Jesus had ever done in his life was bless and heal people. He was the last person who should have been betrayed. I am not asking why God allowed Jesus to suffer, I am asking why God lets the innocent like Jesus suffer; period?

Palm Sunday 1994 Piedmont Alabama. God's people at Goshen United Methodist Church were singing hosannas as it should be. The small rural church was putting on an Easter musical which included the children's choir. In the middle of the service a storm hit and the electricity was knocked out. Even though the taped music they were singing was stopped, the choir kept singing hosannas. Then the ceiling and walls began to fall in as a tornado hit. 20 people were killed among them was Hannah the 4-year-old daughter of the Rev. Kelly Clem. Rev. Clem told her story in Guideposts magazine, but why!? Why does God allow the Hannahs of this world who are praising God to suffer?

October 10, 1991, late in the evening was the beginning of an ordeal that helped teach me a small part of the answer to this question. Mary, my daughter who was barely one year old, became sick. The illness was severe enough that we called her doctor and took her to the emergency room. We all quickly realized that there was something seriously wrong of a neurological nature. The doctors decided that a blood sample needed to be taken to discover the exact nature of the illness.

Now, a one-year old's arms and hands are the cutest things in the world. They are fat and plump and dimpled, but they are a living nightmare to even the most experienced pediatric I.V. nurse. At first, they tried unsuccessfully to take blood from her arms. Then they decided to try the veins in the back of her hands, and all through the successive attempts to find a vein I was the one holding Mary down.

As she screamed, I wondered what she must be thinking. "Make them go away Daddy. Why are they doing this to me Daddy. Why doesn't Daddy do something to make these mean people stop. Why is Daddy holding me down while they do this?"

The next morning in the doctor's office Mary pointed to the bruises on the back of her hands. She couldn't talk, she was barely a year old, but it was like she was trying to say, "Look what they did to me Daddy." If I could have explained it to her I would have. If she had been capable of understanding, I would have helped her realize the necessity of her suffering, but all I could do was kiss the boo boos and hold her close.

Why does God let the innocent suffer? I don't know. I am too little to comprehend such things. Why does it seem that my Heavenly Father is holding me down while mean people poke me and drive nails through my Saviors hands? I can't tell, but I know that I would not let Mary suffer if it were not necessary for some greater good. God is a much better father than I am, so he would not let me suffer needlessly.

I don't have the answer to that big "Why?" - "Why do the innocent suffer?" But that is okay because God does have the answer. God tries to explain it to me in the Word, but I am not capable of completely understanding. When it's all over my Heavenly Father kisses the boo boos, and holds me real close.

If you ever ask "why?" and can't find the answer, that's okay. Just remember God's love. God loves us enough to die for us even though we betray him, and God would never let anything happen to us that can't be turned around to a good purpose. When you are suffering and it seems that God is allowing it, know that it is a means to a blessing. After all, if God had not let mean men hold his Son, Jesus, down and pierce his hands, we would not have a

Savior, now would we?