

A Sunday Friday Conflict
Mark 14:53-72
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Dr. Don Flowers, Jr.
Port Williams United Baptist Church
Palm Sunday, 2021

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Let Port Williams United Baptist Church say, "His steadfast love endures forever!"

No really!

Let Port Williams United Baptist Church say, *"His steadfast love endures forever!"*

Can we say that? Can you say that? As we gather on this Palm Sunday can you add your voice to the throngs proclaiming the goodness of God?

Has God been good to you this week?

How have you experienced God goodness?

No really, can the people of Port Williams United Baptist Church say how you have experienced God's goodness this week? Has God been good?

Especially in these days we need to remember those concrete, tangible experiences of God's goodness! Too often we experience something wonderful in our lives; we might even think, *"Thank God!"* But we quickly move into our more rational side, understanding that the gorgeous sunset was really the result of lightwaves being scattered by molecules in the atmosphere.¹ And that delicious meal that you had, it is really just the talent and knowledge of that incredible chef, or your mother, who knows just the right spices to add to delight your tastebuds—and we won't even go into the chemistry and neurology that happens between your mouth and brain!

God? Sure? But what we say...

There are times when we need to get past our brains, put down our inhibitions and just give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast goodness endures forever! We have even experienced it this week! Can we channel the psalmist and say it?

Can we join in his praise?

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

¹ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/10/131027-sunset-sky-change-color-red-clouds-science/>

*The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.*

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.²

It would be different, especially for us—us who tend to concentrate our faith in our heads. That is not a bad thing, for God knows that a faith without a head is really just pious cotton candy—fun, but it won't sustain you for long! But the flip side is just as dangerous! There are times when we need to have cake! There are times when banana pudding and apple crisp are just what the doctor ordered!

There are times when we need to wave branches and sing our hallelujahs! We need to do that! We—us—we need to do that! Even if it is different, even if it is out of the ordinary!

That is what happened that day in Jerusalem. After months and years of oppression and trouble and pain and suffering the people were ready for something, anything that might give them hope; anything that might remind them that God had not forgotten them. They knew that in their minds. they believed it deep in their hearts, but somehow... somehow they needed something more. All they needed was a flicker of light.

That light came in from Bethany. Many times when we read this story we get confused with the geography. We live in a nation where things are so far apart that we just project our distances onto the story. The reality is that from Bethany to Jerusalem is only about 2 miles, or about the distance to the Irvine Station.

Jesus was making his way into the city. It seemed that everyone was trying to get in to finish up their Passover shopping. It seems that as Mark tells the story Jesus knew a secret way into town, for the road was not that crowded. But as he came in riding on a young colt people were just overcome with emotion! Maybe they were excited about being in Jerusalem for Passover, for many a once in a lifetime event. Perhaps they were remembering the passage they had learned in Synagogue School. Maybe they had heard about this Galilean prophet and were caught up in Messianic Madness.

For whatever reason—and it could have a combination—the next thing you know a spontaneous revival broke out! People were quoting Bible passages! Bible passages! When was the last time that happened to you?

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of
the Lord.*

The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;

You are my God, I will extol you.

² Psalm 118:24-29

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.*³

The steadfast love of the Lord lasts forever, but this celebration doesn't! As quickly as it began, it is over. Mark's telling is so abrupt! *"Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!"*

But then...*"Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After he looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, he returned to Bethany with the twelve."*⁴

If this were a movie we would wonder what happened? Where did the crowd disappear to? Did they have other chores to do, things to do, other obligations. "This celebration was a nice thing. I had a great time and got a wonderful selfie with Peter, but I have to get some pomegranates for supper and the wine is getting low." Did they hear the roar of the crowds as Pilate and his entourage made their way into the city from the other side—rushing to make sure they didn't miss anything? This is great, but how many times do you get to see a real military parade?

And what is going on with Jesus. He has made this trip into Jerusalem, goes directly to the temple and just looks around? Was this a scouting trip? Was he remembering the first time he was there with Mary and Joseph, pointing out to John and Judas where he had sat with the elders? Was this a case of really bad planning and the merchants were already closing up, the last temple tour had already been sold out. There wasn't anything else to do and so they just turned around and walked back home!

Jesus and everyone else! They just went back to where they had come from. It had been fun. Everyone had a great time. They had seen the celebration, the sights...but in the end nothing changed.

Does that sound familiar?

The other week I left worship and felt really good about what we had experienced. There had been a wonderful spirit, Christianne and Mary had played an incredible duet and the sermon...well, if I say so myself was not bad! It was a good day!

And then on Tuesday a friend asked about the sermon...and I couldn't remember! *"That was so 2 days ago!"* I told him! I had already begun thinking about the meeting I had that night, the newsletter article for Thursday, the sermon for the next Sunday. Yeah, I seem to remember that worship was good! But.....

It was good! It meant a lot to me! But life went on. And I really meant to follow up on all the things that I meant to do. There were "planes to catch and bills to pay!"⁵

³ Psalm 118:24, 26-29.

⁴ Mark 11:9b-11

⁵ Harry Chapin. "Cat's in the Cradle." https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tn25ll2n7h5ggtrpbpu2l5epqqe?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics&u=0#

And the next thing we know...it's Friday. And again the crowd has gathered, but this time it is a different scene. The memories of the goodness of God, the eternal faithfulness of God, the "Hosanna to the one who comes in the name of the Lord..." well that isn't even a distant memory.

This is a different crowd and the song being sung is different. Rather than one of praise this is one seeking punishment! Rather than one praising the goodness of God, this one preys on the power of Pilate. Rather than a cry for deliverance, this one is a call for death!

Crucify him!

Crucify him!

Let's be clear! These are not bad people! They have been busy all week getting ready for Passover. They have purchased the lamb, the eggs, the bitter herbs. They will have the whole family for dinner tonight. They will even have a place set for Elijah. They will do all the things that custom requires.

But still the words slip off their lips!

Crucify him!

Crucify him!

These are not bad people. They have just moved on, beyond the hymns of last Sunday. They are just going along, going through the motions, not even aware of the conflict in their soul!

They aren't bad people! Some of them had been at church with their families the last time they were home. They had been polite, catching up with friends; saying hello to the pastor on the way out. They had even sung that old hymn, the one they snicker at but somehow sticks in your mind...*"Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice; Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice! O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son and vie him the glory great things he has done!"*

Yet, there they are, marching on the capital, shouting along with everyone else. They are just going along with the crowd, carrying their flags...until they become spears and battering rams.

They aren't bad people! They grew up in Sunday School where they learned that Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world... But when she becomes an object of lust, the fuel for your addiction it is ok to open fire.

They aren't bad people, in fact they are the kind of people that you really want for your neighbors, the kind of people you want to be like. They look nice, they say all the right things. And they go to church, when it is convenient and doesn't conflict with something else that really is more fun. But when it comes down to it they carefully measure out what they will say, what they will do.

The glory of the Biblical story is that it doesn't gloss over those parts that we would prefer to keep hidden. It reminds us time and time and time again that we live lives of

conflict—within ourselves. Abraham, the father of our faith tries to pawn off Sarah to save his life. David, the one after God's own heart is a murderous rapist. Peter, the one given the keys to the kingdom, the one who swore that he will never leave, swears he doesn't even know the man.

They aren't bad people!

And neither are we!

We aren't bad people....it just that sometimes we find our Friday selves in conflict with our Sunday selves.

Then what do we do?

This week puts that question squarely in front of us!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

You were with Jesus, but he denied it saying, "I don't know what you are talking about. I don't know the man!"

The conflict is in each of us.

It's not going away.

How will we resolve it?

This week will tell!