

**“LOVE IN THE MIDST OF SIN AND BETRAYAL.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden**

**April 1, 2012, 10:30 AM, Palm Sunday**

**Text for the Sermon: Luke 19:28-41**

Each year I come to Holy Week wondering what I will see and hear that will be new. It's such an old familiar story, if we aren't careful we will pass right by and see and hear nothing new and fresh. This Lent season we have been looking at how God hates sin and loves sinners. This Palm Sunday I am struck by the power of God's love in the midst of sin and betrayal and the power of God's love in the midst of suffering and sacrifice.

The Palm Sunday story of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem reminds us that Jesus had perfect knowledge. He could see into the future, He could see into the story that had not been written. He could see the donkey tied up in the village ahead. He could hear the owner asking the question, "Why are you doing this?" Before Him all things are open and transparent. Things seen and unseen are the same to Him, things spoken and unspoken are the same to Him. Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem knowing He would be killed there.

Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of a huge crowd, knowing full well that they would all turn on Him in less than a week. One way to capture that experience this morning would be for our children, who came in a bit ago saying, "Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!", to come back in right now yelling, "Crucify Him, kill Him, away with Him, we want Barabbas instead. Crucify Him!" Can you imagine children turning so hateful, so venomous so quickly?

Greater love has no one than this than to die for the ungodly.

Jesus knew the people of Jerusalem would turn on Him; He knew they would turn Him over to Pilate and Herod. He knew they would mock Him and beat Him, spit on Him and whip Him. He knew they would trade Him for a notorious murderer and murder Him on a cross. He knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He could visualize every detail of it in His minds' eye and yet as "He drew near and saw the city, he wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

Greater love has no one than this.

A few days after His public entry into Jerusalem Jesus kept the Passover with His closest friends knowing that all of them would desert and abandon Him. One would betray Him, sell Him out for 30 pieces of silver. Another would deny Him to a little girl's questions. All would run into the night.

Greater love has no one than this.

The apostle John tells us that "Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him" (John 6:64, ESV). At the table Jesus says, "Behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table" (Luke 22:21, ESV).

Jesus knows the treachery in Judas' heart. He knows what he has put his hand to do. Jesus knows which of His friends have become His enemies. It's all known, all seen, all understood and He's sitting with him in the last intimate moments with His closest friends.

I wonder which was more painful, the betrayal of friends or the scourging of Roman enemies?

Greater love has no one than this.

**Romans 5:6-8** "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (ESV).

Greater love has no one than this.

We were once His enemies. We were once among those who hated Him, rejected Him, denied Him, betrayed Him. We were once the unrighteous.

**John 3:16-17** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him" (ESV).

**Psalms 23:4-6** "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. [5] You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. [6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (ESV)

Fear not, for I have spread a table before you in the presence of your enemies, in the presence of your fears, in the presence of your doubts, in the presence of your anxieties, in the presence of your heartache and failure and disappointments. Fear not, remember, greater love has no one for you than the One who has spread this table.

A table will be spread before us Friday night, a table to keep fresh in our memories this greater love, this love in the midst of enemies. The elements are meant to preach to us a visible sermon. The bread preaches of Christ's physical body given over to death on the cross for our sins. The cup preaches of Christ's blood shed to make atonement for our transgressions.

The elements preach to us of Christ crucified as our substitutionary sacrifice, He in our place, His life for our life.

Greater love has no one than this, that He should spread a table for us in the presence of our enemies and show us His goodness and mercy.

A table in the presence of our enemies to remind us that we were once His enemies and to show us how to love our enemies. Greater love has no one than this that He should lay down His life for enemies who become friends. At the table Jesus says, you are My friends.

This is My body broken in love for you. This is My blood poured out in love for you and the forgiveness of your sins.

As often as you do this, remember Me.  
As often as you do this you proclaim My death until I come.  
As often as you do this, love Me and love your enemies as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this.

Jesus freely set His face toward Jerusalem, knowing He would be killed there,  
Jesus freely rode into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd, knowing what they would do to Him,  
Jesus freely stepped among His enemies for the sake of love.  
Break My body, spill My blood, it's for you. It's for love. It's for a greater love and for a greater glory.

The glory of God is revealed in the greater love. There's no greater love than this.

When we love with love like this, then it will be finished, His work in us will be finished.

### **Application and Conclusion:**

Where are those today who walk among their enemies with love? Where are those today who shed tears of compassion over our Jerusalem?

Where are the Pauls who cry out, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh [who are cut off from Christ]" (Romans 9:2-3, ESV).

Where are the followers of Christ who died to themselves and sacrifice for others?

Who feels so tenderly toward an enemy to pity and pray and cry and seek out? I don't think we would go into Jerusalem, and certainly not if there were enemies there.

**I want to conclude with a story and an old prayer** in the hope that the Holy Spirit will use one or the other in the lives of different ones of us for His perfect and redemptive purposes. A story and a prayer to help us see what love for sinners and enemies looks like.

**The story is of a Masai warrior in Africa named Joseph.** One day Joseph, walking along one of these hot, dirty African roads, met someone who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. Then and there he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. The power of the Spirit began transforming his life; he was filled with such excitement and joy that the first thing he wanted to do was return to his own village and share that same Good News with the members of his local tribe.

Joseph began going from door-to-door, telling everyone he met about the Cross of Jesus and the salvation it offered, expecting to see their faces light up the way his had. To his amazement the villagers not only didn't care, they became violent. The men of the village seized him and held him to the ground while the women beat him with strands of barbed wire. They dragged him from the village to die alone in the bush.

Joseph somehow managed to crawl to a water hole, and there, after days of passing in and out of consciousness, found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception he had

received from people he had known all his life. He decided he must have left something out or told the story of Jesus incorrectly. After rehearsing the message he had first heard, he decided to go back and share his faith once more.

Joseph limped into the circle of huts and began to proclaim Jesus. He pleaded, "He died for you, so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God." Again he was grabbed by the men of the village and held while the women beat him reopening wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more they dragged him unconscious from the village and left him to die.

To have survived the first beating was truly remarkable. To live through the second was a miracle. Again, days later, Joseph awoke in the wilderness, bruised, scarred--and determined to go back.

He returned to the small village and this time, they attacked him before he had a chance to open his mouth. As they flogged him for the third and probably the last time, he again spoke to them of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was that the women who were beating him began to weep.

This time he awoke in his own bed. The ones who had so severely beaten him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. The entire village had come to Christ. (Michael Card, "Wounded in the House of Friends," *Virtue*, March/April, 1991, pp. 28-29).

Greater love has no one than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends and his enemies. Oh the grace of this greater love. Be a reflection of this love in your world.

**Finally**, I want to close with a prayer written by a Serbian Orthodox priest Saint Nikolai. During WWII he was imprisoned by the Nazis in Dachau for speaking out against the Nazis. He witnessed and suffered some of the cruelest torture of human beings the world has ever known, yet he wrote this prayer for his enemies.

This is an uncommon prayer that makes us think in an uncommon way about our personal enemies and those who persecute us or hurt or oppose us in any way. Listen careful and pray with me and see the hand and blessing of God in a completely new light, even as we bless our enemies and thank God for them.

**A Serbian Orthodox Prayer**  
by St. Nikolai of Zicha and Ochrid

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them. Enemies have driven me into Thy embrace more than friends have. Friends have bound me to earth, enemies have loosed me from earth and have demolished all my aspirations in the world.

Just as a hunted animal finds safer shelter than an unhunted animal, so have I, persecuted by enemies, found the safest sanctuary, having [concealed] myself beneath Thy tabernacle, where neither friends nor enemies can slay my soul. Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

They, rather than I, have confessed my sins before the world. They have punished me, whenever I have hesitated to punish myself. They have tormented me, whenever I have tried to flee torments. They have scolded me, whenever I have flattered myself. They have spat upon me,

whenever I have filled myself with arrogance. Bless, my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Whenever I have made myself wise, they have called me foolish. Whenever I have made myself mighty, they have mocked me as though I were a dwarf. Whenever I have wanted to lead people, they have shoved me into the background.

Whenever I have rushed to enrich myself, they have prevented me with an iron hand. Whenever I thought that I would sleep peacefully, they have wakened me from sleep. Whenever I have tried to build a home for a long and tranquil life, they have demolished it and driven me out.

Truly, enemies have cut me loose from the world and have stretched out my hands to the hem of Your garment. Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Bless them and multiply them; multiply them and make them even more bitterly against me-so that my fleeing to You may have no return; so that all hope in men may be scattered like cobwebs; so that absolute serenity may begin to reign in my soul; so that my heart may become the grave of my two evil twins: arrogance and anger; so that I might amass all my treasure in heaven; ah, so that I may for once be freed from self-deception, which has entangled me in the dreadful web of illusory life.

Enemies have taught me to know-what hardly anyone knows-that a person has not enemies in the world except himself. One hates his enemies only when he fails to realize that they are not enemies, but cruel friends. It is truly difficult for me to say who has done me more good and who has done me more evil in the world: friends or enemies. Therefore bless, O Lord, both my friends and my enemies. A slave curses enemies, for he does not understand. But a son blesses them, for he understands. For a son knows that his enemies cannot touch his life. Therefore he freely steps among them and prays to God for them. Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, You were betrayed and You continue to be betrayed. No greater love has been shown to us than Your love for us who were once Your enemies. You have shown us the way of love, the way of sacrifice and suffering that is freeing, that sets the soul free, that releases a flood of love and hope.

When we come to your table this Friday, show us, as we have never seen before, the greatness and beauty of your love, love in the midst of sin and betrayal, love in the midst of rejection, love in the midst of pain and suffering. Enable us to be a light in the darkness. Break our hearts that we might have compassion on our Jerusalem, to see the lost and weep.

Enable us to face our fears, to fear not, but come and see You and Your love and go and tell. Help us to love nothing in this life so much as we love You. Enable us to live in a way that reflects Paul's words, that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Help us to see that greater love is in the cross and the way of the cross and in taking up the cross and following You wherever You lead.