

Palm Sunday Sermon 2017  
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Here we are, on the eve of Holy Week just having read the Passion story of Jesus. We have begun to remember and to walk through the events leading up to the crucifixion, the death of Jesus of Nazareth. We might think about Jesus, the way we think about someone who has just died. David Buttrick put it well: “Our lives are as brief as the hyphen between the dates on a gravestone.” And the point he makes is this: It is not how long we live, but how well, how fully we live that hyphen.

In his book, “The Road to Character,” David Brooks points out the difference between resume virtues and eulogy virtues. Resume virtues are the ones you list on your resume, the skills you bring to the job market that contribute to external success. The eulogy virtues are deeper. They are the virtues that get talked about at your funeral, the ones that exist at the core of your being—whether you are kind, brave, honest, or faithful; what kind of relationships you formed.

What we know is that Jesus lived a mere 33 years, but He lived it fully, giving glory to God by His faithful and loving ways. He tells each of us, “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.” What does such a life look like? In Jesus, it looks like a man who was in right relationship with his God whom he called Abba, father; in right relationship to all people, and to all creation. He trusted his faith experience that truly he was beloved of God, and that truth freed him up to be Jesus. He wasn’t called to be John or Matthew or Peter, but to be himself, to discover and to be freed in this way. He made his life’s goal to let others know how precious they, too were: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” He was not afraid to reach out to others different from himself; a Samaritan woman, a group of men suffering from leprosy, a woman suffering from hemorrhage, another, bent over. He opened himself to questioning religious leaders, to a rich young man and a poor widow. He allowed himself to be ministered to by **own men**. He taught and befriended fishermen and tax collectors, and he enjoyed being with children. “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.” Living life fully looks like one who lived 30 years in a small town engaged in the daily nitty-gritty of a carpenter’s workshop. It looks like a person who is willing to risk 40 days in a desert wrestling with the meaning

of his identity and his mission in life. One who gave priority to communion with God in prayer and time for leisure with his friends in Bethany. One who enjoyed a wedding party and a good glass of wine, one who, at times, had no where to lay his head. One who took note of and revered all of creation around him; lilies of the field, sparrows, seeds and sheep, light and darkness, wheat and wind and water. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full. Living life to the full looks like one who laughed and cried, fished and cooked, forgave and blessed, and loved profoundly. It looks like one who loved his gift of life with a passion, and did not want to suffer or die: "Let this cup pass." But one who would face aloneness, betrayal, failure, suffering, even death, rather than to turn his back on God and those he loved.

What is it that keeps many of us from living life fully? Fear would probably surface as one of the reasons. As Ted Loder put it: "...fear has spooked me into a hundred hiding places." Fear of what others think of us, fear of failure, fear of not being in control, fear of the new and different. Besides fear, we are perhaps burdened with things from the past: hurts, betrayals, disappointments. Irenaeus, as early as the second century wrote: "The Glory of God is the person fully alive." We've seen what that looks like in Jesus! What would it look like for each of us? What would it mean if we should let go of our anger and refusal to forgive a past hurt or betrayal? What would it look like if we, all of us, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Zoroastrians— what would it look like if we all loved God enough, trusted God enough to let go of our fears and to love others as we would have them love us? We are all more alike than we are different. In our failings as well as in our accomplishments.

In the words of John Henry Newman, "Fear not that your life will come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning." Today we remember, but more than this, we celebrate the beginning! We celebrate the beginning the world's involvement with God through Jesus of Nazareth. We celebrate the beginning of a new story, not one about betrayals and defeat and death, but of overcoming and moving beyond and raising up. We celebrate that we can see deeper than outer appearances, longer than temporary circumstances, and wider than self-centered, temporary goals. We are given the gift of knowing God's virtues, God's way, and God's eternal blessings. Today we remember the death of Jesus of Nazareth, but we celebrate his Life and the Life he has given to us! Now and forever!

AMEN.