



LESSONS IN LIVING

Making Sense of the Easter Story

“Part 3 - Love is a Revolution”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
March 29, 2026

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

“Console my people, give them comfort,” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem’s heart, and tell it that its time of service is ended, that its iniquity is atoned for, that it has received, from YHWH’s hand, double punishment for all its sins.”

A voice cries out, “Clear a path through the wilderness for YHWH! Make a straight road through the desert for our God! Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low; let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges become a valley! Then the glory of YHWH will be revealed, and all humankind will see it.”*

**YHWH represents the divine name found in the Hebrew text. It represents the Divine Mystery and, traditionally, is not pronounced. Instead, we say “God” or some other term of reverence.*

Sermon

Well, it's always been strange to be a friend or a member of St. Andrew's. *[laughter]* This church has sailed through many a storm for a lot of people that were not popular at the time. Sometimes our problem was with the denomination, and we had to face procedures.

And I remember years ago I was on trial for... We were ordaining LGBTQ people, standing up for women's right to have determination over their body and to be respected as moral agents. I was preaching on the Easter passage, and all of a sudden I was in trouble enough to understand what the story means.

And I realized if you're not standing on a gallows, it's really hard to understand what's at stake in the Easter story, what's at stake in the story we had today, where people are facing off with Rome to do not just a parade but a protest. And to know the consequences of that could be very, very serious.

And to realize that Jesus was murdered by Rome, executed by Rome, not because of any religious reasons, but because his message felt like a threat to the systems of domination that were in power at the time. Remember, Rome didn't care what you believed as long as you knelt before their power. That story really hasn't changed much through the ages.

And you happen to be living out the story of Palm Sunday, whether you want to or not, particularly if you're a friend or a member of this community. I don't know if you've read the newspaper lately or gone online, but you're not very popular. And I've tried to distance myself *[laughter]* because I'm just a poor, humble country preacher.

But one of our members is running for Senate. *[applause]* And it's hard to convince people that as much as we love this person, his name starts with a “t”, we're still a church. We're not partisan, as much as that may seem untrue.

Our issue is universal human rights. And there's one party that's very good at that... Well, no, there's no party that's really very good at that. But there's one party that's very bad at that, and the other is at least hypocritical. *[laughter]* At least gives lip service. We got to start somewhere.

But what does love mean if you don't care about human rights? What does love mean if you don't care whether the air people breathe is poisonous or the water that they drink is poisonous? How useless Christianity would be if it weren't political.

Now, it shouldn't be partisan. It should include everyone. But you have to stand up to bullies if you're standing up for everybody. Universal human rights is not a partisan issue. The environment is not a partisan issue. And anyone who tells you otherwise is lying. Universal human rights is one nonpartisan issue. The environment is another.

If we don't stand up for everybody and offer others every right we claim for ourselves, we are a part of their oppression. It's not enough to love people from the sidelines. We have to protect each other. We have to stand up for each other. We have to advocate for one another.

Now there's some parts of the Christian church that beg to differ. I'd like to read you a very inspirational quote from Pete Hegseth. *[laughter]* He prayed at the Pentagon this week and called for “overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy.”

He prayed that “God would break the teeth of the ungodly.” Anybody that prays that prayer better have a good dentist. *[laughter]* And my favorite quote this week, he said, “We negotiate with bombs.”

I'm an old guy. 50 years ago, that would have been unthinkable. 20 years ago, that would have been unthinkable, that somebody would think that they're speaking as an American, talking about war crimes against our human family. Relishing in violence. Confusing cruelty with courage.

And he was a very brave podcaster, don't get me wrong. It's a cabinet full of podcasters, talking heads, very similar to the leadership when Jesus was there. Now, if Jesus were just a religious

figure, he never would have done the parade on Palm Sunday. This is an act of defiance, an act of contempt against hierarchy.

But that Christianity was murdered early in the womb. It's always been there. Mystics have always held to kindness and love as the essence of the teaching. But very cruel people in the name of Christ murdered the mystics, and then said they were God's ambassadors on Earth.

One of those very profound spiritual figures talked about our beloved member, James Talarico, and said the psalmist was not shy. The psalmist did a prayer: "God, destroy them, make them as dung on the ground."

One of the clergy said, "I pray that God kills him." Then he did some theological gaslighting. And nobody's better at theological gaslighting than a MAGA Christian. To take someone who told us not to judge, commanded us not to judge. And says if you don't judge certain people, God will judge America.

See, we don't have to wait for a reptilian Antichrist. Anyone who speaks of cruelty in the name of Christ, who defends the oppression of the human family in the name of Christ, is an assault on the message that we're looking at today.

This is not new. Let's look at the first slide. This is a slide I'm going to... We have a new screen so I don't have to turn around. These series of prints come from Reverend Kent Miller and we appreciate... They tell the story.



But what this particular print reminds us is that the people who did the joyous little parade that we celebrated a few minutes ago turned on Jesus on a dime because it was Jesus or Barabbas.

Barabbas was the MAGA Messiah: powerful, patriotic, cruel. Jesus was soft on crime.

Jesus was not particularly religious. He was critical of religious hierarchy. This sketch... And I'll look at the other one, but I want to try to get out of your way.

Notice the little white spaces between the people. Kent told me that those are symbols of daggers. The white daggers. There is a type of Christianity that is murderously cruel and is the very repudiation of the kindness and grace and lack of judgment that Jesus calls us to.

I believe more and more as I get older and older that Jesus did not come to teach us Christianity. Jesus came to teach us radical and universal love.

Some of the meanest people I've ever met call themselves Christian. Some of the most ignorant people I've ever met hid behind that label. So the question I want to ask as we go through this

sermon, every step along the way is, “Are the people that are attacking your Christianity, do they sound more like Jesus or the people that killed Jesus?”

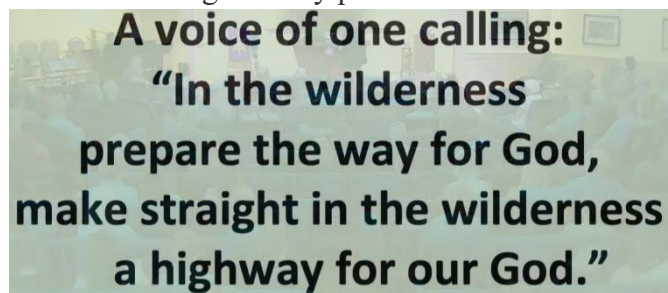
Because they're saying you're not a Christian. So that's the litmus test I would like for you to use, and I think you'll be at peace from now on knowing that they have to attack you because you're too frightening to them.

Your love shines a light on their hate. Your science shines a light on their superstition. They are not bad people, but they're very frightened, and they're very dangerous.

So as we walk along the way, that question, I would like to come back to it from time to time. Now there are three mistakes about Palm Sunday that I think are mistakes about the idea of Christianity in the first place. Let's go to the first quote.

Palm Sunday is sometimes called the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is backwards. If you will look at this quote, you see that it's been punctuated wrong in many places.

“A voice of one calling,” and then a punctuation point. Because the way you usually hear it is, “A voice of one calling in the wilderness.” But notice how it's punctuated. “A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness, prepare the way for God.’” Now the wilderness was where all the rejects were. That's where you... When you kicked people out, when you said they were unclean, that they're not worthy to be in your midst, in your congregation. That's where you would kick people out to.



A voice of one calling:
**“In the wilderness
prepare the way for God,
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.”**

So Jesus was saying, leave your holy temple. Leave your patriotic center, and go out into the wilderness, and find the lost and the broken. Does that sound more like Jesus than MAGA Christianity?

So people look at you and say you don't care about morals because you love the people that we hate, and you stand up for people, and you treat them like human beings. Jesus said, judge not and God won't judge you. That's the new deal. Don't judge other people and whatever you've done wrong will get dropped.

MAGA Christianity is just the opposite. They teach a lie from hell that if you don't judge your human family, if you look at them with respect, if you treat them like human beings, that God will punish you. Does that sound more like Jesus or the people that killed Jesus?

Jesus was killed by the moralists. It wasn't the village people that killed him. It wasn't liberals. It wasn't communists, socialists. It was people whose morality was so rigid that it could not take in all forms of humankind. And so instead of learning and growing and broadening their heart, they amputated members of their human family. And that's never gone away.

So when MAGA Christianity talks about Sharia, but can't find any examples of it, but tells you you need to be afraid of your Muslim neighbor... That children are going to school as one gender and coming back on a different gender, like they have operation rooms in the school. I mean, it's very stupid, but it's working. Because if you keep scaring people, they shut down upstairs.

If you don't understand that Jesus was teaching "no one is unclean," the Levitical Code is gone. It's a lie to say Jesus came and died so we could eat ham. Jesus came to teach us to see the sacred, the Christ, in each other and to look past the physical differences and to see the human heart.

So when somebody says you don't care about morals, because you forgive, and you love, and you include. Just ask yourself, "Does that sound more like what Jesus said, or does it sound like the people that killed Jesus?"

The second quote I want to look at... A lot of people see Palm Sunday as lifting up King Jesus. But it's really important to realize he rode a donkey in. It's really important to remember he said, "I've come not to be served but to serve." Can you worship a God who isn't a bully?

**Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.**

Can you worship a Christ who refuses the crown and the throne? Can you follow someone who takes the lowest place? This passage that you're seeing will get you in trouble every time because this is a call to Jubilee.

This is the song that Mary sang at Jesus's birth. The mighty will be lowered, and the weak will be raised. The hungry will be filled with good things, and the full will be sent away empty. The mountains will be lowered and the valleys raised. It's social revolution. This is why Rome got panicked. This is why the priests got panicked. This is why the governmental officials panicked.

Jubilee means reshuffling the deck where everybody has a chance for a life of dignity. You cannot do that within capitalism. Do you understand that? If you get your values from property rights, you've said "no" to Jubilee.

Jubilee's reshuffling the deck so that human rights take precedence. Yes, you can have property rights, but human rights are the context of property rights, not vice versa. A country that lets people starve, a country that lets people die of preventable diseases, is not a Christian nation.

A politician who cuts funding for children... I mean, I agree that religion should not be partisan. At the same time, if you say you believe in Jubilee and then vote for people who make it impossible for there to be a middle class, for people to get medical care, for people to have work that has meaning to it.

Do you get kind of a sense why people wanted to kill Jesus? That's scary stuff. And maybe you can understand why some people don't like you very much either. The Christian message is revolutionary. You cannot answer this call within the status quo.

And so to realize that what we're being called to is a love that is so powerful that it changes the world. It makes it on Earth as it is in heaven. That's not the Christianity I was taught as a child, probably not the one you were taught as a child. But it was the one that I longed for. The one that would make sense to me.

So again, when somebody says you're not patriotic enough, you're not bowing before King Jesus, you don't submit to the hierarchies of the status quo. Does that sound more like something Jesus said or like the people that killed Jesus?

Last example. One of the key elements of Christian Nationalism, of MAGA Christianity, or of fundamentalism is that there're insiders and outsiders. There're chosen people and outcasts. It's wrong to kill Americans-- unless they're liberal. The Venezuelans-- kill them, murder them. They don't need due process. Or bombing Iran. Or ignoring the misery in Gaza or in so many places.

Jesus called God “Heavenly Parent” not to talk about the gender of God, but to tell us that humankind is our family. And we cannot love our Heavenly Parent if we're abusive to each other.

So the passage says, “And the glory of God will be revealed” to all people. All people.

**And the glory of God will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.**

What kind of a God would love some of the children and not all of the children? What kind of a Christian could accept a cosmology where some of your human family goes to hell for eternity?

Love longs for the happiness of every being. And what the story is telling us is when we live out of that passion and compassion for other people, we're on a holy parade.

That path, walking that path, even if it seems hopeless. Giving some time this week to universal human rights, to the environment. Giving some gift, no matter how small, puts you on the path to heaven.

I don't believe in heaven and hell, but I do believe sometimes it feels like heaven and sometimes it feels like hell. And when I love, it feels like heaven eventually. And when I'm griping, it comes back as unhappiness.

Martin Luther King did a sermon on Palm Sunday, and the whole thing, just about, was focused on Gandhi. Isn't that interesting? How do you think MAGA would really feel about a preacher that preached about a Hindu from India when he was talking about this Palm Sunday passage?

This is what he said. He says,

One of the strange ironies of the modern world, that the greatest Christian of the 20th century was not a member of the Christian church.

That would have gone over real well. [laughter]

When Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold,"

King says,

I think Jesus is saying here in substance that I have followers who are not in this inner circle. He's saying in substance that I have people dedicated in following my ways who have not become attached to the institution surrounding my name. I have other sheep that are not of this fold, and my influence is not limited to the institutional Christian church.

He said of Gandhi,

More than anyone else in the modern world, Gandhi had caught the spirit of Jesus Christ and lived it more completely in this life.

How does that feel in your heart? [pause]

**And the glory of God will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.**

It's an interesting time, and I can't tell you how proud I am to be a part of a community that's willing to join this parade. Willing to be lied about, to be vilified. Kind of remember Jesus said that was going to happen?

From people in the church who are so afraid, who were taught a lie at infancy and have never found the courage to step out of it. Maybe this will be that opportunity. Maybe if we return love for the hate, forgiveness for the judgment. Maybe if we model the teaching, the world will begin to change.

But in any case, knowing the path that you can walk the rest of your life of dignity, meaning, and worth, knowing that no matter what happens in the world, you will contribute to a better future. To me says what we're really talking about is this parade, is the road to the promised land.

So look back at the... Thank you, they changed the picture. They've gotten where they can read my mind.



Sometimes the church is like that-- pious daggers.

And it doesn't take evil people, any of us can fall into that. But to realize Jesus is calling us out of that. The cross is not a symbol of God's anger. It's a symbol of the pain that love sometimes costs us and a reminder that it's worth it.

When people say you don't care about morals, from the core of your heart say, "God has said call no one unclean."

When someone wants you to worship before a hierarchy, to kneel before King Jesus and “I’m the viceroy, I’m the intermediate, I’m the ambassador,” sing of Jubilee. Sing of a justice that does not need kings or bullies.

Sing of a love that is so deep and profound that it wants to give others every right that it claims for itself. And then finally, open your heart to a love that’s big enough for everyone, that needs no scapegoats, that needs no one outside it to feel its worth. And to know that is your home, and that is your heaven.

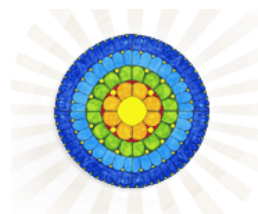
We’ll take a moment now for you to reflect on your own thoughts on this passage.

Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

Tough times, and I know it’s hard to remain a loving presence, but I will remind each and every one of you that each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. And that spirit knows when you skin your knee, or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go out into this wonderful world and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace. And love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew’s Sermon Transcription Project.



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