

# **“A Sermon for Palm Sunday” by Brenda Seat**

**April 9, 2017**

## **Palm/Passion Sunday**

On Palm Sunday, we usually hear the Biblical narratives of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem and the passion Jesus experienced in the days that followed. Although these readings are powerful, they can also easily become stale and routine and after hearing them every year they can wash over us with such familiarity that we are sometimes not even touched by them.

This year Celebration Circle decided to do something a bit different that might allow us to hear these stories with new ears and open hearts.

In a few minutes we will hear poems read by Lauren, Dave and Mary Carol, reflecting on the events of Palm Sunday and Christ's passion. We hope that these new words, retelling this powerful and ageless story will touch you in surprising ways.

The events of Palm Sunday are often portrayed as a joyous celebration much like the poem we heard at the end of Circle Time. The joyous crowds, the palm branches waving and the exuberant cries of Hosanna often drown out the deeper meanings that lie underneath that journey into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Our first poem written by Canadian poet and Mennonite pastor, Carol Penner, gives us that deeper perspective and reminds us that the events of Palm Sunday and Holy Week are not simply historical events; but are present realities. Her poem is entitled *Coming To A City Near You*.

Lauren Seat will read this for us.

*Coming To A City Near You*

*Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue,  
to houses prepared for wedding parties,  
to the pools where people wait to be healed,  
to the temple where lambs are sold,  
to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight.  
He comes to the governor's palace.*

*Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you,  
to new subdivisions and trailer parks,  
to penthouses and basement apartments,  
to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,  
to the big box outlet centre and to churches,  
with the same old same old message,  
unchanged from the beginning of time.*

*Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you  
with his Good News and...  
Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!  
The very stones cry out,  
"Hosanna in the highest,  
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
The crowds jostle and push,  
they can't get close enough!  
People running alongside flinging down their coats before him!  
Jesus, the parade marshal, waving, smiling.  
The paparazzi elbow for room,  
looking for that perfect picture for the headline,  
"The Man Who Would Be King".*

*Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you  
and gets the red carpet treatment.  
Children waving real palm branches from the florist,  
silk palm branches from Wal-mart,*

*palms made from green construction paper.  
Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals,  
in monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.  
King Jesus, honored in a thousand hymns  
in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.  
We LOVE this great big powerful capital K King Jesus  
coming in glory and splendor and majesty  
and awe and power and might.*

*Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Kingly, he takes a towel and washes feet.  
With majesty, he serves bread and wine.  
With honour, he prays all night.  
With power, he puts on chains.  
Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state  
in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan, the crack  
addict,  
asking for one cup of cold water,  
one coat shared with someone who has none,  
one heart, yours,  
and a second mile.  
Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.  
Can you see him?*

*[Coming to the City Nearest You, by Carol Penner]*

We now move from the events of Palm Sunday to the passion of Christ. Our next poem by Andrew King, who is a self described "customer service worker" in a fast food restaurant from Ontario Canada is called *Sestina For the Passion of Christ*.

Dave will read this for us.

*Sestina For the Passion of Christ*

(Matthew 26:14 – 27:66 or John 18:1 – 19:42)

*He is alone in prayer in the garden, knowing the cost.  
His followers care, but flesh is frail and they fail  
to fend off sleep as Jesus endures his mortal fear  
with faithfulness. This night will bring betrayal,*

*abandonment, suffering, and ultimately, a cross.  
But he will not turn from obeying the will of God.*

*He is alone in facing trial for blaspheming God.  
The religious rulers are determined at any cost  
to be rid of this nuisance Jesus. But though they cross  
words, set their traps for him, they almost fail.  
Judas' earlier duplicity is matched by betrayal  
of truth; and the rest of Jesus' followers have fled in fear.*

*He is alone in front of Pilate, but showing no fear.  
Is he King of the Jews? Is he somehow from God?  
Pilate doesn't know, doesn't really care. Betrayal  
of justice doesn't bother him much, the only cost  
he worries about is the empire's peace. Fail  
and he'd pay the price; so send this King to the cross,*

*it's an easy call. Kill the pest, quiet the Jews. The cross  
is just another tool when you rule by fear,  
after all, so why be worried about truth? (This fails,  
somehow, to ease his mind; but he holds the power of God,  
of life and death, so death it will be, at Jesus' cost.)  
And Pilate's lethal injustice is the final betrayal.*

*Jesus is alone, crowned with the thorns of betrayals.  
He is mocked and whipped and abused, and the cross  
is placed on his shoulders, and the high cost  
of love mounts the hill of the Skull. Fear  
only forgetting love's suffering; forget not the grief of God,  
as the sky grows dark as if the sun itself has failed.*

*Do the women wonder if faith has failed  
as Jesus is laid in the tomb? Is hope's betrayal  
on Joseph's mind, as he wraps this man from God  
in burial cloth? The death of Christ on the cross  
for many meant grief, despair and fear;  
only later would they understand what was worth the cost:*

*that we are not alone in times of fear, nor when we fail  
– bearing the costs of our small and large betrayals –  
nor even in death: for Jesus, God's Son, died for us on the  
cross.*

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Our last poem is called *The Hands of Passion*, also by Andrew King, Here the passion of Christ is retold from the perspective of the many hands that were involved. The hands of Jesus who helped others, the hands that poured perfume on Jesus feet, the hands of Judas gripping the money he received, the many hands who led to his crucifixion and burial.

Mary Carol will bring us this reading.

*The Hands of Passion*

(Mark 14:1 – 15:47)

*I tell of the hand, its suppleness, strength,  
how it performs every wish of our thought:  
subtlety to smooth and shape wood, clay, paint;*

*and by its powers great structures are wrought.  
With the hand we salute, we show caring,  
kindness; the hand undoes the tangled knot,*

*lifts the fallen and helps the ones bearing  
the heavy load; the hand the instrument  
of holding, releasing; keeping, sharing –*

*whatever it is that our hearts have meant  
to accomplish. Consider then the hands  
at work in this story. See the pair bent*

*to pour the perfume on Jesus. It lands  
fragrant, filling the still air with rich breath,  
gift of tenderness to one whose commands*

had healed many, but for whom, she knows, death looms. From hands flow love. But hands, too, clutch greed, cruelty in their fists. See Judas, met

by the chief priests in the grip of their need to be rid of Jesus. Judas' hands reach for the coins of betrayal. He will feed,

one of the twelve, at the table, where each will protest steadfastness. See their hands dip with Christ's in the bowl. And what does it teach

when Christ's hands break bread for us, when the sip of the cup handed round is his blood? When his hands wash our feet on their dusty trips

through the roughness of the world? Can we learn forgiveness from his fingers? Or will ours be the hands of injustice, those that spurn

mercy: swords waved in the garden, glowers of fury on faces, hands tearing clothes, hands striking, abusing him through the hours.

See the guards hang on him a purple robe. The hands whipping. The ones placing the crown of thorns. Words and hands conspiring as goads

as he stumbles on his way up the hill. Down the long years we have seen what they did there, the hands swinging hammers, nailing his own

to the cross. But see, with the curtain's tear, God's hand at work too: the cross is the way to salvation. At last with Joseph's care

hands are tender again, and thus display

*again the heart's power to love; and so  
even a tomb, on this darkest of days,*

*becomes touched by the presence of grace. Go  
to touch with that grace whatever you will.  
Be Christ's hands. Let the redeemed heart show,  
that this crucifying world know his love still.*  
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Be Christ's hands. Let the redeemed heart show that this  
crucifying world know his love still  
Amen.

[i] More of Andrew King's poems can be found on his blog at  
<http://earth2earth.wordpress.com/about/>