

“Loud Noise, Sudden Dread”  
Sermon for Palm Sunday  
Texts:

Loud, unexpected noises stimulate a fearful response in man. Recently, an immense flock of grackles swooped down upon the black cherry tree next to our house. Their numbers were such that the sky darkened for they blocked the sun. Because my shade was drawn, I did not see them coming. I heard their landing roar and, as I rose to explore these strange things, they took off again. Their wings were as loud as a plane taking off! Then, more recently, there was the roar of combustion as the flames of our wild fire torched a patch of weeds in our field. I had no idea how flammable those weeds were! The noise inundated my senses. It is as if there were nothing else in the world but the clamor of those dangerous flames, flames that soared fifteen to twenty feet in the air . . . enormous tongues of consuming fire. As they engulfed us, they dwarfed us. Terrifying. We could be destroyed by fire. Both us and our home. And all that was just in the tiny orbit of my life!

No man is made fearless. Nor is fear abnormal when loud noise brings sudden dread. In the wider world, in the world in the grips of a pandemic of COVID-19, or in those parts of the world where the roar of clouds of desert locusts appear—and crops and all are devoured by that insect plague . . . the air is filled with the sound of their consumption, interspersed in the wind of their path. We are in a day of fear. And this is to say nothing of the ongoing swath of death by violence, war, malnutrition and disease: heart attacks, cancers, and accidents and overdoses. Such is the setting, such is our day of fear. What has Palm Sunday got to do with all that?

In a word: fear not! The king has come. He is approaching, storming the gates of the city of man—*just as he promised!*—he brings hope, and help and healing in his wings. Are you afraid? Look to God. Remember the phrase ***just as he promised***. Have you memorized Psalm 56:3-4c:

**When I am afraid.  
I will put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise,  
In God I trust; I shall not be afraid.**

It is printed on our money, now let's imprint it on our hearts! Or, entrust to your memory Deut. 31:26, spoken to Joshua as if spoken to yourself:

**Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land (promise) that I swore to give them. I will be with you.**  
(presence)

Here are two strong sources of bravery: the promise of God and the presence of God. It is not written that there will be no danger, nor jeopardy. It is not written that there's nothing to be afraid of. The encouragement is: **when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you**. Have you considered that **trust in you** is *faith*? When things are scary because they are fearsome, I will seek remedy, strength and help in faith. I

will turn to God, I will choose to put my trust in him. Sing out loud: *God of grace and God of Glory, On thy people pour thy power . . . Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the facing of this hour, For the facing of this hour.*” For the facing of the terrors of our day, our fearful day—with all its threatenings. Meaning, empower us to face the world as it is, remembering, as we do, that you are still on your throne. This world, bleak as it appears, is still yours and in your world, *your promises are secure.*

The promises of God. Jesus, our glorious king rode into Jerusalem on the promises of God *seated on a donkey*. That’s what Palm Sunday has to do with our day of fear. There is nothing in this virus, nothing in the locusts, nothing in all the dire circumstances that any condition can summon up which can nullify, cancel, circumvent or contradict your **sworn promises**. Your promises remain, they are sure. Jesus rode into such a world of fear as the one we inhabit today. Wars, famine, death by diseases—each with their own terrors! He rode into this world. I do not say this to minimize in any way the specifics of our circumstances; no, I say this to point out that not only do we have the promises of God, we have a God who delivers those promises in person. Nothing can inhibit, deflect, or distract him. He is the everlasting King of Glory. Psalm 25:

**The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof  
the world and all those who dwell therein  
for he has founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the rivers. (vv.1-3) . . .**

**Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the king of glory may come in.**

**Who is this King of glory?  
The Lord, strong and mighty.  
the Lord, strong in battle!**

**Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the king of glory may come in.**

**Who is this King of glory?  
The Lord of hosts,  
He is the King of glory! (vv.7-10)**

Who is this King of glory? Jesus is the King of glory. **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!** (Matthew 21:9)

**Say to the daughter of Zion  
Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. (Matthew 21:5) . . .**

**And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this? And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee. (Matthew 21:10-11)**

Not only did he come to us in the promised fulfillment of prophecy, he has chosen to remain with us: **I will be with you** in the midst of it all, **I will never leave you or forsake you.** (Hebrew 13:6c.)

We are in a pandemic and locusts are devouring Sudan and Kenya in East Africa, the hospital beds in many of our major cities are filled with the infected, sick and dying. What good is a triumphal entry now? Listen, and you will be strengthened. Bring to mind the promises of God. Remember that he is the High Admiral on the ship of this world. He is above any king, president or prime minister! Leaders come and leaders go—circumstances change and they are swept away. But our God remains. He does not abdicate, step down or run for re-election. Politics do not define him, nor do they constrain him. None can subvert his purposes and he has chosen to bless his people. Therefore, tremble before him and not famine, locusts or Covid-19. What are they to him but instruments with which to implement his will? God is in control. He steers, he directs, he saves, he preserves *in and through storms*, he will bring his elect safely home to harbor.

Does he not govern all creation? All the actions of all the living—their state, numbers and conditions are his to rule over. All the armies of heaven and earth serve at his beck and call. His will and not our wishes. God is not obligated to our wishes, but to his promises and his sovereign will. We choose at times like this to exalt our God as God. Lord, reign over us. Lord, be glorified and honored and praised . . . we will lean on your promises and trust you. Increase of faith to master our fears. Can we rely on his love and care? Always . . . especially in the day of trouble. He is above and within our day of fear. Does he cease to be our protective Father? Can a virus, or insects drive him off? At a word, both perils can be snuffed out as a candle. And if it were for our good, it would happen instantly. Have we prayed for intervention? The intervention is happening. That we do not see it yet means nothing as to the outcome. Does he not protect, defend and provide in the worst of times as certainly as the best of time?

Let us take this time to exalt the Lord while we may as long as we may so that he will prove a sanctuary to those who take refuge in him. **He is our refuge and our strength.** Let's embrace the day and pray for our faith to increase, be strengthened and purified because that is consistent with God's will for us from days past. I mean, let us focus on his almighty power, vigilant care, unspotted faithfulness, his covenants of engagement—all, in all his promises. Where we shall be transformed into his promised land: there he will be our God and we will be his faithful people. And what if we die, shall we not be led into the paths of glory to rise and live with him forever? That's how I read it. How do you?

Do you yearn for peace and calm and quiet in your souls? Meditate on the promises of God. Make reservations in the city of God for the King has come and entered in already! Promises secure courage and in the face of faith, fear can only decline. **Our greatest danger is unbelief in the security of God's promises—**not a virus, not a plague of locusts, not famine, not fear. Only those who do not

know God should panic. They have good reason to—the less their faith, the greater their fear. Be wary of spiritual distrust, friends. Speak to the rising storm within, reiterate your Lord's words, "**Peace. Be still.**" and these strong words, uttered in faith will have a wondrous calming effect again. Even if we feel as if we are under siege in our day of fear, God's people have been here before.

In our reading through the scriptures, we have followed three kings (Saul, David and Solomon). We need to leap ahead some sixty years to the first of two situations related to sieges of Jerusalem. First under King Jehoshaphat (late 9th century BC—61 years after Solomon) and, later, under Hezekiah (early eighth to late 7th century BC—some 215 years since Solomon, 154 years later). Part of the psychology of siege warfare was to cut off vital supplies (food and water), induce famine, starvation and sickness in order to subdue the city. Beginning with Hezekiah (2 Chron. 20), the Moabites, Ammonites and some others (Meunites) formed an alliance to attack Jehoshaphat **and he was afraid** (v. 3)—these were the very people that God had commanded the Israelites under Joshua to eradicate from the land. Asa, Jehoshaphat's father, and Jehoshaphat were father and son reformers—but Asa relied on foreign alliances, and not on the Lord. He fell into disfavor. He attacked the prophet who exposed his faithlessness and, subsequently died of a severe disease. Jehoshaphat learned from his father's negative example and he trusted in the Lord. However, he did become entangled with Ahab, the king of Israel, the later died in battle despite Ahab's attempt at disguising himself.

Jehoshaphat instituted some fine legal reforms: In the countryside, **Consider well what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord, he is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking bribes.** (19:6-8) He also reformed the courts in Jerusalem. He was righteous, devout man. So when he came under attack he went into the house of the Lord **and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.** (20:3) and prayed:

**6 "O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You. 7 Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? 8 They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying, 9 'Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.' 10 Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and [a]Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), 11 see how they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance. 12 O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You."** I point out that this king looked to God, called upon his promises. **Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be**

**established. (v.20) And here is the result: 22 When they began singing and praising, the Lord set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were [a]routed. 23 For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.**

Moving ahead to Hezekiah. Here's a poem by Lord Byron first published in 1815 in his "Hebrew Melodies." summarizing the defeat of the Assyrians who laid siege to Jerusalem. The poem is based on the biblical account of the historical Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC by Assyrian king Sennacherib, as described in the Bible (2 Kings 18–19, Isaiah 36–37). This siege (701 BC) followed upon a successful Assyrian campaign in Judah (and that following the defeat of Babylon in southern Mesopotamia) was in retribution for their failure to pay tribute. An army under the leadership of Tartan and Rab-saris of 185,000 soldiers, surrounded Jerusalem—there was death and destruction on every side! A most hopeless and desperate situation but God spared the city by sending **the angel of the Lord** to slaughter Hezekiah's enemies overnight!

The Destruction of Sennacherib- a poem  
BY LORD BYRON (GEORGE GORDON)

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:  
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,

And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;  
 And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
 Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Following Hezekiah;'s example, here's what we are to do: **Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established (v.20) . . . we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us. (v. 9)**

Ephesians 6:13

**"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**

1 Corinthians 16:13

**"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."**

The King is coming into your world of anxiety, distress, or Fear. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

**Say to the daughter of Zion  
 Behold, your king is coming to you,  
 humble and mounted on a donkey,  
 on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.**

**Amen.**

Benediction: Philippians 4:1

**"Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."**