

Psalm 18:1-11, Mark 8:31-32, Mark 11:1-11

Prayer

On this Holy day of Palm Sunday and Passion,
we have so many mixed feelings inside of us.

We remember your son's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem
with the people shouting praises and waving Palm Branches.

And we join them with our praises and yet
we remember too that this wonderful parade for your son becomes
becomes a dark journey before officials and the booing crowds.

And instead of the crowds singing his praises, they are shouting to crucify him.
Darkness comes.

And our hearts are broken by those screams
and the pain and suffering he bore that day.

And yet we know that it is because of his choosing to enter
Jerusalem and taking the path he knew he was taking,
there is hope, grace, love, and salvation for all.

And there are still many in need of hope in the dark days in our world.

There are still many in need of your grace in our world.

There are still many in need of your love in our world.

And there are still many in need of salvation in our world.

Lord, enter our lives, our churches, our cities, our countries
once again today.

Heal us, Lord. Transform us, Lord. Renew us, Lord.

Draw us closer to you in this journey of Holy Week,
empower us with strength and courage, and
with the assurance that you are with us, world without end. Amen

It's an image we have seen or experienced. For me, it's a cartoon image in the form of a child much like Charlie Brown's friend, Pigpen. Except rather than dusk under his feet wherever he walks, it's a dark cloud hanging over his head. A dark cloud of impending doom.

Jesus had warned his disciples many times of that impending doom. He would suffer, be crucified, die, but no one would accept this truth. Peter tried to quiet Jesus.

It's a sunny day, but there's a dark cloud on the horizon. It was the beginning of Passover, packed with travelers celebrating delivery from the darkness of slavery from Egypt.

Bethphage, the gateway city to Jerusalem where the Sanhedrin—the court of seventy-one—were they acted to as YEHOUVAH's judges and rendered decisions free from sin.

Bethphage— a place where a decision rendered free from the temptation of bias, exposed at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Bethphage, the Sanhedrin where they were responsible for recognizing their Messiah.

Bethphage, where decisions made for the most rebellious criminal in Israel, sentenced to die. It's a sunny day, but a dark cloud begins to form on the horizon.

Bethphage, where Jesus told his disciples to go and obtain a donkey. Fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy about adoring their king riding on a donkey.

Bethphage where people lined up, praising him, calling him the King of Israel (Matthew 21:1-17) crying "Hosanna in the highest," unknowingly selecting the paschal lamb for the sacrifice.

A dark cloud was forming over the horizon on a sunny day. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, many cheered, but their faith awaits testing. Jesus did not live up to the conquering Messiah of popular imagination. A dark cloud is forming. Their cries of

cheer would turn to calls of crucifying. The dark cloud forms over Bethphage, the house of the unripe figs.

Early morning, leaving, Jesus saw a fig tree that had no eatable fruit. Finding no evidence of emerging figs, Jesus cursed it, and the fig tree withered away and suddenly died.

We know the parable of barren fig tree where a man plants and tends the vineyard three years, expecting fruit. The owner had a right to expect a crop, being patient, waiting for fruit, finding none, he ordered to cut it down.

The dark days ahead, Jesus on a beast of burden into Jerusalem, a story of the fig tree. Yet the days of Beth phage (the House of Unripe Figs), the Sanhedrin, are numbered.

The demise of Sanhedrin and all those associated with them was at hand. They showed outward leaves, but like many people, pretended to have fruit where there was none. Religious, but fruitless.

That Passover week, a dark cloud followed Jesus, both prophet and king. He goes into God's house, overturns the money changer tables, and stated: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.'" It was then religious leaders begin to look for ways to kill him.

Later, Jesus said, "the kingdom of God will be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). The entry by Jesus marked the beginning of dark days with battling words like." **"fools, blind guides, whited sepulchers, murderers, a generation of snakes, "hypocrites"** the house of the unripe figs.

There's a dark cloud forming on the horizon. It was a sunny day. A man once called a prophet, and now a King was stirring up the city. Jesus's death made at Bethphage. At the temple, his sentence proclaimed. In the Roman court, Pilate permitted his death.

Bethphage-in the house of unripe figs is where the dark cloud begins to form over Jesus's head. He knew, yet he took the journey.

A dark cloud formed on the horizon to his way to Jerusalem to fulfill His destiny on the cross of Calvary, to set us free.

Right now, it might seem there is a dark cloud hanging over your head, as an individual, as a nation, as a world. Our journey is no different than Jesus'. It is the way of the cross, our hope, the way. Before reaching Jerusalem, we have to go through Bethphage. We feel the dark cloud over our heads. Our spiritual fruit is green, inedible, and sour! That is the Bethphage experience. But because of Jesus, The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my redeemer. My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. It is Jesus who says

John 15:4 If you live in Me and me in you, you will bear much fruit.

With a dark cloud over his head, his last act with his disciples was -communion. It speaks louder than words can express- so we use a symbol-the fruit of vine/ a piece of bread to remember the Good news is on our darkest days, Christ is with you.

He is our healer. He is our comforter. He is our hope of salvation. As we prepare for the dark days, let us remember that the light has come into the world. Perfect love cast out fear. It does not mean we can avoid the journey, but we find comfort knowing Christ will come to all who seek him.

I once heard a pastor say, never leave your people in the dark: give them the good news. One lesson I learn about the darkness, about the wilderness journey, is you can leave the wilderness too soon. Holy week is about walking and remembering the dark days of Christ, as we anticipate his victory over death and darkness.

Let us celebrate the Great Thanksgiving as we journey to the cross. A place where the dark cloud was finally taken away and replaced with hope, faith, and love.

Let us journey back with it began, in the dark, in the upper room. Let us set with Jesus and his disciple eating together. Hold the fruit of the vine and the bread of life you have chooses in your hands as we enter into His presence.

Liturgy for Holy Communion- read slowly, softly, let the words speak to your heart.

Preparing to meet the Lord

Lord,
Open the eyes of our hearts
In this bread and wine
Enlighten us to your compassionate
love.
Lord, open the eyes of our minds
To another way of thinking
Where the first become last,
A servant obedient to death
So that the last, might become first
Heirs of God
Joint heirs with Jesus.
Lord, open the eyes of our souls
To this invitation.
Lord, help us see that it is costly,

Denying ourselves
Taking up our crosses
Being broken and poured out
To follow you.
Lord, help us to see that in the darkness
that surrounds us
your gift of grace is with us.
Your grace, love, mercy
Far outweighs the dark we face.
Lord, enlighten the eyes of our hearts
In this holy sacrament
So that we may know
The hope to which you have called us
as your holy people,
Your incomparably great power for us
who believe.

Blessing over the elements

Lord, we give you thanks in this bread and wine.
Do a mysterious thing. We await your presence.

Bless this bread- it is the body of Christ. Bless this wine-it is the blood of Christ, who died for us, who was rose from the grave for us, and who will come again for us.

(Take the bread). "This is the body of Christ-whatever darkness overshadows (me), receive the healing and comfort that awaits you in Christ Jesus." Eat

(Take the wine). "This is the blood of Christ-pour out for you and many for the forgiveness of sins. Receive the love and peace that will protect and deliver you from all the dark clouds hanging over your head. Drink

BREATHING in God

LORD, as we rise to go
Breathe on us
Your resurrection life,
Breathe on us your compassion
And your love for others
Breathe on us your family unity,
That we might be one
As Jesus prayed, we would be.
Lord, breathe on us renewed minds,
transform us,
not conforming to the world around us.
Breathe on us your vision
For your Kingdom is coming
.
Breathe on us your call to go
And equip us by your Spirit's
breath
To be your hands and feet
And minds and hearts
To share the Good News
Of this broken bread
And powerful cleaning wine.

Lord, as we rise, to go,
Breathe on us
Your resurrection life. Amen