

# Save Us!

# Matthew 21:1-11; Ephesians 2:5-11

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day six families in Nashville will sit at their tables with suddenly empty chairs. Evelyn, Hallie, William, Katherine, Cynthia, and Mike will never again share a meal or a joke or a prayer or a moment with their families.

This is the day one family in Nashville will look at the empty chair at their table with mingled grief and horror, trying to understand how their loved one could have wrought such destruction.

This is the day twenty-one families in Uvalde woke to still-empty chairs. Twenty-three families in El Paso. Seventeen families in Parkland, Florida. Twenty-six families in Newtown, Connecticut.

Had we but world enough and time, I could continue with that litany of bereavement because on this day – on every day -- we all woke up in a nation with more guns than people; more tolerance for murder than for limits on gun ownership; more desire for individual freedom than for engaged mutuality.

This is the day we struggle to find words that are not hollow; prayers that are not cynical; acts that are not futile as we search for the path toward a world in which all can flourish.

This is the day we confront the reality of sin and acknowledge our own entrapment within systems and structures and habits of sin.

This is the day we live in the “now and the not yet” of God’s kingdom, recognizing that our world holds both kindness and cruelty; generosity and selfishness; hope and despair.

This is the day we gather at the Lord’s table to proclaim: *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.*

This is the day we wonder what such a proclamation means in a world where school children are gunned down with assault rifles; where trans children are targeted by politicians; where refugee children are crowded into migrant detention camps; where poor children go to bed hungry and abused children go to bed frightened and isolated children go to bed lonely.

This is the day we trust that the crucified and risen Christ is present with each of those children; is present with every child of God of every age in every place.

This is the day we recommit to expressing our trust in Christ through our own presence in places of sorrow; spaces of darkness; situations of need.

This is the day we imagine ourselves among the crowd on the road to Jerusalem, waving branches as symbols of welcome and respect for the arriving Son of David. Like the Israelites of long ago, we know that branches and cloaks are “no match for the forces arrayed against [Jesus and his followers]. The temple priests have scripture and tradition. The Roman officials have their laws and

armies. The centurion soldiers have their breastplates and helmets, and most importantly, their swords and spears. What chance do the people have to stop or sway the powers of the world with only branches in their hands?"<sup>1</sup>

This is the day that "the stories of the symbolic actions of the prophets and the transformative work of saints and reformers remind us that peaceful protest is part of our traditions' history. Gandhi, King, and Mandela prove that nonviolent methods have power. Success [against oppression and violence] is not instantaneous and certainly is not guaranteed. There are costs. Peacefully protesting people have been beaten and killed. Leaders of nonviolent movements have been imprisoned and executed. And yet, when the people gather in weakness, they can change the world."<sup>2</sup>

This is the day we speak words of protest against the evils and ills of this world. This is the day we offer acts of resistance to the forces that threaten the flourishing of all God's children. This is the day we lift up prayers of lament for the sorrows and dangers which bedevil human life, believing that God hears our prayers and sees our troubles. This is the day we lift up prayers of consolation for all who mourn, believing that God hears our prayer and draws near to the broken-hearted. This is the day we lift up prayers of transformation for all who misunderstand power and would use it to exploit or wound, believing that God hears our prayer and acts to redeem.

This is the day we decide how to use our time, talent, treasure to participate in God's kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

This is the week we wave palms and break bread and wash feet and weep tears as we travel from the festive cries of Sunday – *Hosanna to the Son of David!* – to the angry cries of Thursday – *Crucify him!* – to the anguished cry of Friday – *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

This is the week we stand at the foot of the cross on which our Savior died. The cross is where God counters human sin with infinite divine love. It is where God defeats coercive human power with vulnerable divine love. It is where God conquers death with eternal divine love. On the cross, God changes the terms of the struggle between good and evil. On the cross, God states decisively that, though fear and cruelty and sin and death hold this world in thrall for a moment, nothing cannot outwit or outlast or outdo God's intention for humanity and creation to be redeemed and restored. Nothing is or can be stronger than God's love.

*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I shall fear no evil; / for you are with me.*

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Katie Hines-Shah; *Christian Century*; 3-26-2020

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.