

Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 CEB

¹ Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever. ² Let Israel say it: “God’s faithful love lasts forever!”

¹⁹ Open the gates of righteousness for me so I can come in and give thanks to the Lord! ²⁰ This is the Lord’s gate; those who are righteous enter through it. ²¹ I thank you because you answered me, because you were my saving help. ²² The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone! ²³ This has happened because of the Lord; it is astounding in our sight! ²⁴ This is the day the Lord acted; we will rejoice and celebrate in it! ²⁵ Lord, please save us! Lord, please let us succeed!

²⁶ The one who enters in the Lord’s name is blessed; we bless all of you from the Lord’s house.

²⁷ The Lord is God! He has shined a light on us! So lead the festival offering with ropes all the way to the horns of the altar. ²⁸ You are my God—I will give thanks to you! You are my God—I will lift you up high! ²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.

This year, one of the churches I serve turns 145 years old on April 5. Because of calendars and schedules, we celebrate today, Palm Sunday. It’s an odd time to celebrate the birthday of the church. Normally, we think of little children mirroring the Gospel text, as they parade into the sanctuary carrying palm branches as we sing “Hosanna Loud Hosanna!” And yet, despite the oddity of our birthday celebration, the Psalmist reminds us of the very reason we celebrate.

You see, we celebrate the birthday of our local church not because of the success of the people. We don’t celebrate just because the original sanctuary still stands. We don’t celebrate just because the doors are still open. Rather, we celebrate the day 145 years ago that the Lord acted to build Christ’s church up. We give thanks because Jesus Christ continues to save people in this place. We give thanks because God shines God’s light on us, and the Spirit continues to enter the house of the Lord. We “Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.”

As the church of Jesus Christ, we give thanks that through the years, we have been supported and uplifted by the very stone the builders rejected. We celebrate that the Church has endured pandemics and political turmoil, division and fracturing. Despite all that’s going on in the world around us, we stand united in mission in Jesus Christ. All of this is possible because God has acted in our time. God’s faithful love has endured through the Church.

As we enter into this Holy Week, might we celebrate all that our churches have endured? Might our focus be on the way God acts in the days ahead that we might cling to the enduring work of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s take it day by day, moment by moment as we journey with Jesus to the cross. For it is only through the Cross that God’s work endures. Hosanna in the highest!

Let us pray. Holy and Gracious God, we give you thanks for your enduring work in our churches. We give thanks that this enduring work is only possible because we are united in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us as we celebrate your work that we cling to the stone the builders rejected. Help us remember each day as we journey with you to live out our faith that your work might continue to endure through the power of the cross. It is in your name we pray, you who are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



Rev. Ryan Ware is a Provisional Elder in the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church. In addition to serving as the Virginia Conference Ecumenical Representative, he presently serves as pastor of Floral Hills, Rock Springs, & Wesley Chapel United Methodist Churches near Danville. A December 2020 graduate of Duke Divinity School, Rev. Ware also serves in District leadership and presently serves as a part of the UMC Ecumenical and Interreligious Training: Young Adult Network. He is honored to be a member of the Order of the FLAME. He is also a member of the Next Generation of Ecumenists with Virginia Council of Churches.