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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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John 12:12-16; Mark 15:1-39  
“Hosanna to Alleluia”

You might be surprised to hear the stories of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem on the day we call “Palm Sunday” and his crucifixion on the day we call “Good Friday,” read so closely together. We do so because today begins Holy Week, which is the journey from Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem of Palm Sunday to the resurrection of Easter Sunday through the cross of Good Friday.

The reason we include both in today’s worship service is that some of you might not make it to the worship service on Friday at 7 pm where we experience fully the import of the day. We cannot jump from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the alleluias of Easter Sunday without experiencing in some way the grief of Good Friday. We combine the themes of palms and passion by calling today “Passion/Palm Sunday.”

All resurrection – Jesus’s resurrection and our own resurrections – follow death of some kind. It happens that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, which was a terrible way to die and thus signifies the terrible deaths we experience in the world today. The death I will speak of today is pollution.

I shall begin with an unusual approach to Palm Sunday. I will tell a story about one of the most blissful mornings of my life. What was one of your most blissful days?

I grew up across the road from Addington Beach in Durban, South Africa and I would go surfing before school, after school and sometimes during school.

My brother Sydney and I were 14 and 15 years of age and one day we woke shortly before daybreak, donned our surf trunks, fetched our surfboards and dashed to the beach. The wind was light offshore and a perfect swell brought in perfect waves. A near high tide caused the waves to break close to the shore and a well-placed sand bank made paddling out easy to beyond the breakers. Enviously, Sydney and I were the only surfers in the water.

The sun rose with red, pink and yellow hues over the Indian Ocean’s horizon. The waves were consistent and plenty, and Sydney and I rode wave after wave with shouts of wonder and joy. I sat beyond the waves and watched him paddle into a wave, disappear into its tube, and see him blasted out by a rush of foam. I would follow in short succession and he would scream encouragement while watching me and paddling out for more.

According to the Book of Genesis, God created the world and God said it was good. These waves were crisp, clear, and a cleansing. This was the realm of God, given by God as God intended. We were in our zone and could very well have been two people on the road when Jesus entered Jerusalem on this day we call Palm Sunday.

The people cried, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!" This was their blissful day, when they experienced fully the realm of God, and they affirmed their king who would ensure that God's realm of peace, justice and beauty would be maintained.

I see no difference between their blissful day and mine. In both experiences, we experienced the realm of God if for only this brief moment. The people expected Jesus to ride into Jerusalem and become Israel's new king as David of old and establish God's realm. How disappointed they must have been when instead, Jesus landed on a cross.

And, how disappointed I was last Sunday when I turned to page six of the book section of the San Francisco Chronicle to see the horror of horrors, another vision of Jesus on the cross. The feature was a book on photography edited by Tom Butler called *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot*, and there before my eyes was a picture of a surfer standing in a garbage-filled wave.

The caption read, "Surfer Dede Surinaya catches a wave in a remote but garbage-covered bay on Java, Indonesia, the world's most populated island.

I have seen pollution in the sea and I know all about the circles of garbage in the middle of the ocean, called "gyres" but I have never seen a surfer in a garbage-filled curl. This is Jesus hanging on the cross as far as I am concerned. This is my Good Friday experience year 2015.

We cannot go from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the alleluias of Easter Sunday without passing through the death of Good Friday. The last thing I want to do is pass through the death of Good Friday. I don't want to see Jesus brutalized and killed on the cross just as I don't want to see a surfer locked in a garbage-filled wave.

The stark and dark reality is that Jesus did hang on the cross *and* our natural world is polluted. Suellen and I saw the movie, "Merchants of Doubt" a week ago. It's about climate change communicators of doubt, or more aptly, climate change deniers who sow doubt about the science of climate change. It puzzles me that people will lie about a reality that can destroy our planet, them and their children.

M. Scott Peck wrote a book called *People of the Lie*. He stated, "The central defect of *'the evil'* is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it. More often than not, these people will be looked at as solid citizens. How can that be? How can they be evil and not designated as criminals? The key word is "designated". They are criminals in that they commit "crimes" against life and liveliness.

"But except in rare instances - such as in the case of Hitler when they might achieve extraordinary degrees of political power that remove them from ordinary restraints, their crimes are so subtle and covert that they cannot clearly be designated as crimes.

"The theme of hiding and covertness will occur again and again throughout the rest of this book. It is the basis for the title *People of the Lie*."

We see Jesus on the cross in many ways today. We see our own complicity and we seek forgiveness. Pity those who do not see or who do not want to see and pity our planet.

I had a very disturbing dream 33 years ago. It might be prophetic. I was sitting on the beach watching the sea and a wave rose and in the wave was piles of garbage. I happened to be taking a class at SFTS taught by spiritual director and former professor of theology from Notre Dame University, Morton Kelsey.

Kelsey, now deceased, was a Jungian scholar and an expert on dreams. He wrote two books on the subject, one of them, *Dreams, a Way of Listening to God*. I shared my dream with him and he said the ocean was my unconscious self and for me to be integrated as a human being, in other words, to integrate my conscious life with my unconscious life, I needed always to be close to the ocean. I needed to regularly visit the ocean and meditate by the sea. I liked that suggestion and ensured that wherever I went as a pastor I would be close to the ocean.

The challenge of the meditation was not only to be integrated in my personal being but also to be integrated for ministry and proclamation of God's good earth and to be challenged to keep it good as God created it.

Regarding the picture of the polluted wave in Java, "The book's photographs," writes William Ryerson in the introduction, are "emotionally jarring. The thoughts expressed herein are not reassuring; they are deeply provocative. But that is the nature of wake-up calls." The cross as "wake-up call" is an interesting notion.

Ryerson continues. "The way that human numbers and behavior are transforming the Earth, undermining its ability to support the human family and the rest of life, is apparent for all to see. The reality of this urgent moment calls us to think, to care, and to act."

It is my firm belief, perhaps hope against hope, that we can reach alleluia and next Sunday is a foretaste of that, of resurrection out of death and of God's continual challenge to us to affirm "life in all its fullness." Let us continue the journey this week from the hosannas of Palm Sunday through the death of Good Friday to the alleluias of Easter Sunday resurrection!

Let us hear what God is saying to us and how God is challenging us to be stewards of the earth and therefore stewards of life as God intended.