

## Taking Risks for Love

What a gift we enjoy in being freely gather today for worship – a sacred pause of our daily rhythms to come together for the solidarity we find in community. After a several-year run with an experimental multi-church Palm Sunday gathering, we celebrate Palm Sunday for a first time as the people of St. Croix United Church! We are on the live stream and in this house of worship – on land loved by First Nations and others before us, where we are building community now and into the future.

I invite you to join your hearts with mine in a word of prayer. God of the journey, open and soften our hearts and minds today as we consider Jesus' final pilgrimage to Jerusalem and what it can teach us about taking risks for your way of love, which we know to be more powerful than fear. Hosanna! Your love, O God, is what saves us. We pray as followers of Jesus. Let the people say together, Amen: Amen!

On this Palm Sunday in 2025, let's wonder together: What are we willing and ready to risk as we aim to live in and toward God's way of love?

In today's tapestry scripture reading from three of the gospels, Jesus invites us into three kinds of risk-taking as he travels to and into Jerusalem to celebrate what he senses may be his final Passover festival. For the sake of love, Jesus invites us to **risk rebuke and punishment** by those in power, to **risk disappointing people** who think they know us well, and to **risk upsetting the status quo**. And Rev. Ellis Miller invites us to risk rejection.

Let's begin by seeing how Jesus models willingness to risk rebuke or even punishment by elders by acting outside of bounds when they were trying to maintain what little control they had within the community.

John writes: *“So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council and said, ‘What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.’”*

According to this gospel writer, Jesus was aware of this perspective held by his religious elders, so he went into relative hiding -- teaching and healing in out-of-the-way places. We honor that our Jewish neighbors worldwide began Passover last evening – on April 12<sup>th</sup> in 2025. As the annual Passover festival approached in Jesus’ time, many wondered if Jesus would reappear publicly to join in pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

We heard his neighbors wondering aloud: *“They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, ;What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?”*

Even though Jesus knew the tight spot in which his respected, beloved religious elders found themselves with the powers and principalities of the occupying Roman army, Jesus was willing to risk their rebuke and even punishing actions, because his faith compelled him to publicly celebrate Passover (as the feast of the liberation of the people) with his disciples and wider community.

Twentieth century pacifist pastor, teacher and author Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the courage of conviction that our Christian faith ought to inspire in us – such that we do not avoid showing up publicly on behalf of causes of justice and mercy. We know that he was executed due to his faith-based activism. Bonhoeffer wrote this: *“Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much.*

*Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now. Christians should take a stronger stand in favor of the weak rather than considering first the possible right of the strong.”* Words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

**I wonder: will each of us risk rebuke and punishment by those in power in order to keep embodying love and justice?**

Let’s move to how Jesus models willingness to risk disappointing people by doing what he could and needed to do as opposed to what they wanted and expected him to do.

In the portion of our gospel reading that comes from Luke, we heard about people spreading their cloaks on the road as Jesus passed by. This was a sign of great honor and respect. In other gospels’ renderings of the story, we would read of people waving palm branches as a sign of great joy and triumph. They were expecting Jesus to be able to turn the political situation completely for them and liberate them from the powers that were in control.

In Luke, we heard this: *“As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’”*

**I wonder: will each of us risk disappointing people by doing what you can and need to do as opposed to what people who really think they know us have wanted or expected us to do?**

Let's move to how Jesus models willingness to risk upsetting the status quo by insisting on a better (that is, more loving and just) way. In the portion of our gospel reading that comes from Mark, in confronting those who were selling and buying within the temple animals for ritual sacrifice, Jesus drew on their sacred teachings, saying, *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."*

The late U.S. Representative from Georgia, John Lewis, on the fiftieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, AL, said to a gathered crowd: *"So I say to you: Don't give up. Don't give up on the things that have great meaning to you. Don't get lost in a sea of despair. Stand up for what you believe in."* And two years before his death, he said, *"Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."*

**Will each of us get into good and necessary trouble for the sake of love and justice?**

From another voice – Nikita Gill of south England is an Irish-Indian poet, playwright, writer and illustrator. She writes of the fiercely loving justice warrior that any of us can be in the way of Jesus. Hear this from Gill: *"The rage you are feeling comes from the same place inside your heart as the love. This is why you refuse to accept a world where cruelty reigns and the fire consumes all. You have known hope and joy and kindness like you have known water. And justice is a river that demands you do not give up on it."*

**I wonder: will each of us risk upsetting the status quo by insisting on a better (that is, more loving and just) way?**

And in our second reading for today, Rev. Ellis Miller offered these words within their reflection on Palm Sunday – they said: *“This time [Jesus] was coming out as one who was willing to stand up against the authorities, and risk everything, even his life, for what he believed... what a difference it must have made to be witnessed by his friends, to be fully seen and known, to be carried to the next chapter with their embodied joy.”*

**I wonder: will each of us risk rejection by coming out more fully with our whole heart, soul, mind, body on behalf of radically loving justice?**

I would like to close by sharing with you a blessing from Irish teacher and poet, John O’Donohue in his book *To Bless the Space Between Us*. It is entitled “For a New Beginning.” As we seek to kindle our courage, I invite you to close your eyes if it helps you to hear it more specifically directed to you. O’Donohue writes:

*“In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.*

*For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.*

*It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.*

*Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,  
A path of plenitude opening before you.”*

May courage kindle within each of us such that we risk rebuke (even punishment), disappointing those who think they know us well, disturbing the status quo, and possible rejection – in order to keep pushing for love-based justice, because Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll  
St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)  
April 13, 2025 | Palm Sunday  
John 11:45-57, Luke 19:28-40, Mark 11:15-18, “Coming Out with Jesus”