

## **The Other Way: The Way of Surrender, Not Conquest** **Psalm 37:1–9 / Luke 19:28b–40**

Today is Palm Sunday. It is the day we remember and celebrate our Lord's entry into Jerusalem. But Palm Sunday is not only a day to remember what happened long ago. It is also a day to look at ourselves and ask: Which path are we walking now?

When Jesus and the crowd of disciples entered Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate, there was another procession entering the city from the opposite side: Pontius Pilate and his army. Pilate knew the spirit of liberation that always stirred during Passover, and he feared rebellion. So, to prevent any uprising, he entered Jerusalem on the first day of Passover with his troops. Riding a magnificent warhorse, surrounded by heavily armed soldiers, he came as a conqueror, displaying power, authority, and control.

And at that same hour, Jesus entered from the other side. What was Jesus riding? A donkey. Between Pontius Pilate on a warhorse and Jesus on a donkey, who looked more powerful? Of course, it was Pilate. Compared to Pilate's procession, Jesus' entry looked painfully humble. Pilate came in the way of the ruler. Jesus came in the way of surrender, giving himself completely to the will of God. In the eyes of the world, that path looks like defeat. But God saves the world through those who surrender themselves completely to God's will.

As many of you know, I went on the Wesley Heritage Journey last week. It was a profound journey, retracing the footsteps of John Wesley, reflecting on their meaning, and also reflecting on my own calling. Personally, the place where I experienced the most grace during that trip was Pill Harbor. [PPT]

It is called a harbor, but as you can see in the photo, it is a tiny place, almost more like a mudflat. I'm told that even this much water is rare. Usually, it is mostly mud. So why is this seemingly insignificant little harbor remembered as an important Methodist heritage site? In fact, this place is closely related to our church. Can you guess why? [ppt] It is the place where Methodist preachers, including Francis Asbury, our church's namesake, boarded ships to cross over to the New World. When John Wesley received a request to send more preachers to America, he asked at the Bristol Conference, "Who will go to America?" And 26-year-old Francis Asbury volunteered.

As he boarded the ship at Pill Harbor, he wrote in his diary, "I am going I know not whither... but I know that God is sending me." Knowing he might never see his parents again, he left behind the familiar land of England and threw himself into an uncertain future across the vast Atlantic. He surrendered himself completely to God's will. And you and I are people who owe a great debt to this one person who surrendered his life to God.

Standing at Pill Harbor, I thought about those who crossed the Atlantic in faith: Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, and many nameless Methodist preachers. They left Pill, lost sight of the shoreline, and sailed into the unknown, trusting completely in the One who had called them. They crossed the Atlantic.

Then I thought about Henry Appenzeller, the first Methodist missionary to Korea, Mary F. Scranton, Robert Hardie, and many other nameless Methodist missionaries who also answered the call and crossed the Pacific. Because of people like them—people who surrendered themselves to God—I am here with you. That felt deeply humbling to me. And honestly, it made me deeply grateful.

Standing there in Pill, at that muddy little harbor, I had this strange feeling that I was like a salmon returning to where it was born. It felt as though I was being brought back to the place

where something important had begun. And in that moment, I felt called to surrender myself to God again. To trust again. To loosen my grip a little more. To follow wherever God may lead. And the truth is, we are all called in the same way.

We often misunderstand the life of faith. We think faith is about conquering our problems through faith. When difficulties come, what do we do? We pray. We ask God for help. And that is good. Of course it is good.

But in the end, if prayer becomes our way of trying to direct life exactly where we want it to go, then we may be missing the heart of faith. True faith is the adventure of surrendering to God's sovereignty. Asbury saw the amazing history of God begin not when he followed his own plans, but when he gave them up and surrendered to God.

So I want us to ask ourselves honestly: Do we only want to arrive at the safe destinations we have planned? Or are we ready to offer ourselves to God's call, wherever God may lead? The path we are called to walk is the path of surrender, to the will of God.

### **The Way of Peace**

Of course, walking in the path of the Prince of Peace is not easy. It is especially hard in a world filled with war and hatred. Speak about peace in the middle of war, and people will often treat you like a naïve fool.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu recently said in an interview, speaking about the need for military strength, "History proves that, unfortunately and unhappily, Jesus Christ has no advantage over Genghis Khan. Because if you are strong enough, ruthless enough, powerful enough, evil will overcome good. Aggression will overcome moderation." What he is really saying is this: Pilate's way—the way of conquest, force, and domination—is the truth.

But we are called to walk the other way. One of the places that touched me most deeply on this journey was Coventry Cathedral. [PPT] During World War II, Coventry was heavily bombed, and the cathedral was left in ruins. But instead of clearing away the wreckage and pretending nothing had happened, the people chose to leave the ruins as they were and build a new cathedral beside them. They did not erase the wounds of the past. Instead, they created a sacred space where memory, grief, hope, and peace stand together. When we visited, many young students were there, learning about peace and reconciliation.

[PPT] Behind the altar of the ruined cathedral, the words "Father Forgive" are still inscribed. Those two words stayed with me. When families had been torn apart by enemy shells, when livelihoods had been destroyed, when even the cathedral—the home of their souls—had become a ruin, the people were said to be filled with rage and crying out for revenge. It was then that the provost of the cathedral wrote those words on the wall behind the ruined altar: "Father Forgive!"

Because that short prayer did not even specify who should be forgiven, he was ostracized by the townspeople. And yet that brief prayer—so simple, so bold—still speaks to the hearts of many even now, as a prayer of reconciliation and peace. Inside those ruins, our Bishop Bickerton gave each participant on our journey a small cross necklace and told us that we are all called to be people of peace. And then, without anyone prompting us, we all began to sing, "Let There Be Peace on Earth." That hymn became a confession of my heart.

To be honest, lately, when I look at our frustrating and dark reality, I have often turned to Psalm 58 to soothe my anger. Let me read part of it to you from *The Message*:

“Is this any way to run a country?  
Is there an honest politician in the house [and the White House]? ...  
Behind the scenes you weave webs of deceit,  
behind closed doors you make deals with demons. ...  
God, smash their teeth to bits! ...  
Let them dissolve into snail slime...  
Before what they cook up is half-done,  
God, throw it out with the garbage!”

This is the word of God for the people of God! What do you think? Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? It sounds like words that express our anger exactly as it is. Even though I know how important peace is, I have often prayed that psalm as a way of pouring out my complaint to God. But through this journey, I came to realize that the better prayer is this: Father, forgive. That prayer of forgiveness and reconciliation is the path our Lord showed us by surrendering everything to the will of God. And it is the path we are called to walk together.

### **96 Years of Surrender**

My beloved Asbury family, today is a very special day. It is the Sunday closest to the 96th anniversary of Asbury United Methodist Church. For 96 years, this church has been a “Pill Harbor” for this community. For nearly a century, people have come to this place to hear the call of God. Our church wasn't built on the “way of conquest.” It wasn't built by people trying to be the most powerful or the most prominent. It was built by people like Francis Asbury—people who were willing to surrender to the will of God.

As we celebrate 96 years, we aren't just celebrating a building. We are celebrating 96 years of surrender. Ninety-six years of choosing the donkey over the warhorse. Ninety-six years of praying for peace instead of revenge.

But we aren't done. The journey doesn't end with the 96th year, and our journey will continue. Can I get an amen? As an act of recommitment for our 96th anniversary, I invite you to pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer with me. This is a “dangerous” prayer because it tells God that we are no longer the captains of our own ships. It is the ultimate prayer of surrender.

Please stand as you are able, and let us pray these words together:

### **The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer**

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.