

Stephen Shaver

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

March 29, 2026

Palm Sunday, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

Matthew 21:1-11 (Liturgy of the Palms)

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 26:14- 27:66

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“His blood be on us, and on our children.”

One of the most chilling lines in scripture; and one of the most dangerous.

For centuries this line has been used to justify violence against Jewish people — especially at Holy Week — by reading it as a curse the Jewish people called down on themselves. “His blood be on us, and on our children.”

That reading is a horrific sin; and an ironic one. In using it to justify hate and persecution Christians have engaged in the exact scapegoating and mob violence that Matthew’s gospel has the crowd doing in the first place; this crowd that moves in a few days from welcoming Jesus with palms to shouting, egged on by a small elite, for his death.

With that history of anti-Jewish persecution in mind we might wish that line, “His blood be on us and on our children,” were gone from the story. Yet we may need to sit with it as we realize that it applies not to the Jewish people but to the human people; to Christians with Jewish blood on their hands; to Pilate with his ridiculous little performative handwashing, as if somehow that could absolve him of the responsibility for an execution only he could order; and in fact, though we may not wish to claim it, to all of humanity, including ourselves. We are people with blood on our hands. We participate in systems that deal in exploitation, dehumanization, and violence. Right now bombs are dropping in our name, as they have been off and on around the world throughout our lives. Right now the comforts and resources we use are tangled up in harms to people and to the earth.

“On us and on our children.” As a parent I often reflect on how my children whom I love so much have been born into a world that is God’s beautiful beloved creation, and also that is so deeply marked by violence. I can’t prevent that. None of us can fully shield those we love from experiencing the world as it is; from suffering, and from inflicting suffering. Maybe this line isn’t so much a curse as a lament: the violence of this world is on all of us, and as every therapist or pastor or maybe every human being at some level knows, it’s passed down through the generations in ways we can’t stop.

“His blood.” Sometimes people speak of the blood of Jesus as if it were a sacrifice offered to appease a vengeful God, a God who delights in punishing so much that in order to forgive anyone this God has to take all that collective punishment and heap it up on an innocent victim. A monstrous God; a God of blood. But the cross is not God punishing Jesus so we can go free. The cross is God entering this world that we, not God, have made bloody; because God could not stand for us to be in it alone. The cross is what humanity in our violence inflicts on God when a God who is pure love, pure integrity, comes among us. Jesus is not separate from every other martyr and political prisoner and dissident for justice throughout history. He is their sibling and their emblem and their leader.

The cross is not good news, in itself. It’s brutality and tragedy. But the good news in it is God’s solidarity with us in this bloody mess we have made. Jesus walks clear-eyed into the betrayal, the sham trial, the mockery, the state execution, the whole machinery of human violence. He shows us what love and faithfulness mean even when justice is a mockery and friends have fled and evil has won. Which is so much of the world we know. And having absorbed it all, he dies. And yet love is stronger than death. Today is the Sunday of the Passion, but it is still Sunday, and every Sunday is a little Easter, the day of resurrection. The resurrection is present today but in mystery: it shines forth in a way that is muted, hidden, secret.

We enter Holy Week carrying the truth of who we are: people whose hands are not clean, whose children inherit a wounded world. His blood is on us, and on our children. But so is his love. And we walk toward a tomb that will not stay sealed, trusting that the God who entered this world’s suffering from the inside is even now making all things new.