

A Different Sort of Love Song
By Larry Augsburger
1 John 3:11-24
April 5, 2009

- I. Today is Palm Sunday, which created a challenge for me in my planning since I wanted to extend my “Singing Songs of the Kingdom” series through Easter.
- A. Technically, the story of the triumphal entry doesn’t say a thing about singing.
- B. Rather, what it talks about is shouting.
1. The crowds shouted their Hosannas to Jesus as he entered the city.
 - a. They didn’t sing them—they shouted them.
 - b. Singing “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” is a more modern thing.
 2. So in the literal sense, the text doesn’t report any singing.
- C. But in the metaphorical sense that I’ve been using in my series, there was some powerful singing going on as Jesus rode into town.
- II. The music of the kingdom resounded powerfully over the approaches to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and songs of the kingdom reverberated within and around the walls of Jerusalem all that week, although the music changed in nature as the days slipped by.
- A. The music of what has come to be known as Passion Week was expectant, excited and vibrant as Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem.
1. Jesus sang the role of triumphant king as he rode into the city.
 2. And the crowds figuratively sang songs of rejoicing as they shouted,
Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!
- B. But the music shifted into a decidedly minor key as the week went by.
1. *Luke says that ...every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him.*
 2. *A bit later Luke says, The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately.*
 3. *And later yet, Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.*
 4. It was like someone had his finger on the record and the music was slowing down and becoming distorted and depressed.
- C. And finally on Thursday night the music horribly morphed into a dirge.
1. *The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.*

2. *(The crowd) kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"*
 3. With loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified.
 4. *When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him.*
 5. *After his death they took (his body) down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock.*
 6. The music of Friday was dreadful and hard to listen to.
- D. On Saturday the music moved from a dirge to full lamentation.
1. The music of Saturday is full of dreadful, low-pitched discords that make it seem like the world has come to an end.
 2. The music of Saturday is a wail of grief and misery and loss.
 3. The music of Saturday is the sound of tears streaming down an anguished cheek and soaking into a dripping handkerchief.
 4. We hate the music of Saturday.
- E. In fact we hate all the sad, dreadful music of Passion Week.
- III. But, sad as it is, we need to understand that the music of Passion Week is a love song.
- A. Now the usual image that comes to mind when we speak of a love song is something entirely different from this.
1. The term love song brings to mind beautiful young men and women caught up with hormones and lust and dreams of happy-ever-after-ness.
 2. Love songs of this nature fill popular culture and swell Billboard charts.
- B. But the love songs of Passion Week are radically different from that. The love songs of Passion Week show us the real music of love.
1. *John makes the love song connection for us in 1 John 3:16 when he says, This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*
 2. *And Paul says, Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 3. True love is love that will even die for the one that is loved, which is exactly what Jesus did on Good Friday.
 4. *Jesus sang a love song on the cross that Friday afternoon as while we were still sinners, he died for us.*
- C. Now we humans have a hard time identifying with a love song that leads to death, but on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus sang a different love song, a love song that is easier for us to join in singing.
1. We find his Thursday love song in John 13.

2. *Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. He got up from the meal, poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*
3. Jesus sang a love song by his selfless act of washing his disciples' feet.
- D. So for Jesus, singing love songs meant two things.
 1. On Thursday it meant washing his disciples' feet.
 2. And on Friday it meant dying on the cross.
- IV. And what we learn from observing Jesus singing love songs during Passion Week is that "Singing Songs of the Kingdom in the Midst of the Kingdom of the World" is a sobering thing when we use Jesus as our model.
 - A. This is especially true of Jesus's Friday love song of dying for his fellow human beings, but there are many Christians who have had to sing that song.
 1. A recent estimate is that probably 70 million Christians have died for their faith over the centuries.
 - a. Now some critics dispute this number because it includes people who were Christian in name only who died in religious wars and what is now known as genocide of an entire region.
 - b. But still, there have been millions who were martyred because of an active living faith in Jesus Christ.
 2. The list of those who died for their faith begins with Stephen and James.
 3. In Acts 26:10 Paul speaks of others put to death during the early persecution of the church although they're not named.
 4. Then there were many love songs of martyrdom in the early church about which we know mainly by legend—stories about Peter and Paul and the other apostles and then about many other church fathers and mothers and nameless others who died in persecutions during the first centuries of the church.
 5. Ironically the church itself became a persecutor in the middle ages, and many died for understanding the faith in a different way, with our own Anabaptist ancestors as a prime example.
 6. Lately there have been the love songs of martyrs in the twentieth century—which was the bloodiest century for Christian martyrdom of all centuries.
 - a. Those who made the estimate of 70 million total martyrs estimate that 45 million of the 70 million were martyred for their faith in the twentieth century—more than all previous 19 centuries combined.
 - b. They estimate that an average of 160,000 Christians have been killed every year since 1990 in places like Algeria, Nigeria, Sudan, and Pakistan.
 7. We have brothers and sisters singing Jesus's Friday love song today.
 - a. It used to be that communism was the chief persecutor.

- b. But in today's world, radical Islam and radical Hinduism have become major perpetrators of Christian martyrdom.
 - 8. It is seldom that we of the western world are asked to join in singing Jesus's Friday love song of dying for our faith, but many of our brothers and sisters in other nations have been asked and are still being asked to sing this love song of death.
- B. But even if we are not asked to sing Jesus's Friday love song of martyrdom, we are asked to sing Jesus's Thursday love song—the song of caring and service.
 - 1. Jesus says, *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*
 - a. Jesus's call to wash one another's feet was a call to be a servant—to do what no one else wanted to do.
 - (1) And it meant more than just begrudgingly doing what needed to be done.
 - (2) It meant serving others with joy, happiness and willingness.
 - b. Paul's directions to slaves in *Ephesians 6* seem relevant—*Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*
 - c. The whole genius of Christian service is encapsulated in this idea of *serving the Lord, not men.*
 - (1) Now there's no question that what you see when you serve is human beings—men and women with skin on.
 - (2) Now often those we serve are fine, worthy people—fellow Christians or the deserving poor. That we can do well.
 - (3) But sometimes those who demand our service are shiftless, scheming, conniving, unworthy men and women.
 - (a) People who really don't deserve our service.
 - (b) People who wouldn't need help if they'd just made some wiser decisions.
 - (c) People who could take care of themselves if they'd just have the initiative.
 - (d) It's kind of hard to do things for people who aren't willing to do for themselves.
 - (4) But, Paul says, those people—they're not the ones you're serving. Who you're serving is actually God. So *serve wholeheartedly.*
 - 2. In 1 John 3 John gives us further insight into *what love looks like* when he says, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can*

the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

- a. John says it's not enough just to feel pity for someone or to express concern about their plight, but it is to do something about it.
 - b. Being a servant means to take action and to share one's material possessions.
3. Compared to Jesus's Friday love song of dying for the faith, his Thursday love song of service is much easier to sing.
- a. But yet it often seems hard to sing because we compare it not with singing the Friday song of martyrdom, but with singing our own song of self-interest.
 - b. It was a song of self-interest that all the disciples sang that evening.
 - c. Only Jesus was willing to sing the love song of service.
 - d. And what he's saying to us is, "You have to abandon your song of self interest and sing the song of love and service."
4. And that brings us to the genius of Xnty and the love songs of Jesus.
- a. These love songs transcend anything that anyone else is singing.
 - b. While everybody else is clinging to their rights and their self-interest, the Christian is to sing a different sort of love song.
 - (1) This always includes the Thursday love song of service.
 - (2) And it sometimes includes the Friday love song of dying.
5. The love songs of passion week are a different sort of love song, but Jesus calls on us to sing them.
- V. Today we want to celebrate both aspects of Jesus's love songs of Passion Week.
- A. First we will celebrate his love song of dying for us in the observance of communion by which we remember his body and blood.
 - B. Second we will celebrate his love song of service by washing each other's feet.
 - C. Let's turn to the love song of dying by reading Matthew 26:17-30.
 1. These elements of bread and cup of which we partake are symbols of Jesus's love song of death on the cross for our salvation, and by partaking of them we are reminded once again of what he did for us.
 2. I invite you to file down the side aisles, to partake of the elements, and then to head out the center aisle to the foot washing rooms to show your willingness to accept Jesus's directive, *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.*
 3. If you choose not to wash feet you may return to your seat after receiving the elements.
 4. As soon as you have completed washing feet, return here to the sanctuary and reflect on how you might join in singing a different sort of love song.
 5. We will sing 257 *Were You There* as we partake of the elements.
 6. Let's pray before we come forward.