

# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Apr 14, 2019 – Palm Sunday

## A Fortress Faith?

(Psalm 31:1-16 with Refrain #1)



In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me be put to shame;  
In your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

(Psalm 31:1-2)

### A lesson from Psalm 31

Our image this morning was painted by Joseph August Swanson – an the first version, painted in 1990, hangs in the Center for Continuing Education at Notre Dame University – a later reworking, done in 2012, hangs in Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral in Los Angeles – here's what the 81-year old artist, of Mexican and Swedish ancestry, says about the image – "I wanted to convey my feelings from being in marches for peace and justice. This scene has been repeated countless times in the lives of heroic and selfless leaders who have fought for love, peace, and social justice. It is relived in the lives of Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Oscar Romero, and Cesar Chavez." – I like the richness of this image – the buildings that look like ones in this city – the mix of people in the crowds – the threatening clouds overhead, anticipating the horrific events of the coming week, and the look on Jesus' face – wide-eyed surprise, or anxiety, or calm? – that's part of the mystery of Jesus that Swanson was hoping to convey – so here, in the midst of threats and derisions, Jesus 'invades' the fortress of the powers of his day to challenge their way of being and doing – that's the core of the narrative here

### Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- I can't imagine Jesus not having Ps 31 in his mind as he rode on the back of that young donkey – trust in God's faithfulness in the midst of the uproar – there were shouts of appreciation and support from some, but you have to imagine also that there was deep suspicion and animosity from the vast majority of those surrounding him that day – Swanson captures better than most artists the military occupation of Jerusalem in those days – the soldiers are everywhere, nervously watching over this invasion
- In the week to come, this invasion of fortress Jerusalem is resisted, and not only by the occupying military and political power - Jesus' execution, in the end, is demanded by the respectable religious folks of the city – none of this disruptive

'peace and justice' stuff that will change their comfortable status in the social order they were determined to defend – these leading citizens had scorned Jesus, found him to be a horror, dreaded his arrival, schemed against him, and were already plotting to take his life – this is not news to Jesus – he knew what he was getting into when he “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” as Luke records in 9:51 – the safe place for him would have been to stay in the villages where so much of his ministry had happen – in the hills, where he would have been hard to find – but he did not chose that kind of safety – his trust in God led him to confront the powers that distorted and denied love, peace, and social justice directly

### **How does this all relate to our witness as a fellowship of the friends of Jesus?**

Jesus' actions are the clearest indication of God's desires, of what God offers us as his beloved friends as “refuge” and “rescue” – the “strong fortress” is not a protected haven to which we can withdraw in safety – rather, it's more like the “armour” that the early church would have considered as it studied Ephesians 6:11 – in the midst of indifference and persecution, that church was encouraged to be strong in following Jesus into God's future of justice, kindness, and humility, to reiterate, as we often do here at Brentwood, what God desires, as witnessed to by the prophet Micah – it's the calm that we carry in our souls by faith, a gift of God, that provides protection in the face of the death-dealing rebellions against God's desires that continue to traumatize our world – the path to salvation within the strong fortress of God's steadfast love lies through death, whether it is death to our old selves as a new self emerges in faith or our death to this body as a new one clothes us – but the assurance that God offers is that, in Jesus Christ, the power of death to destroy us has been defeated – the only fortress we need is God's love – but God is clear – that love does not provide a retreat from the world, with all it's problems – rather, it provides guidance and courage to work with God in saving the world

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

