

# Palm Sunday, Gospel Year A

**I REST MY LIFE IN YOUR HANDS, O GOD; BUT  
FIRST, HEAR MY LAMENT!**

**Psalms 31:9-16**

**Palm Sunday**

**Analysis by Fred Niedner**

*9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.  
10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;  
my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.  
11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my  
neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances;  
those who see me in the street flee from me.  
12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;  
I have become like a broken vessel.  
13 For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—  
as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my  
life.  
14 But I trust in you, O LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.”  
15 My times are in your hand;  
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.  
16 Let your face shine upon your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love.*



## **DIAGNOSIS: Wrecked, Wretched, Wasted**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): How Miserable Am I? Let Me Count the Ways***

It's awful, Lord. Everything has gone wrong. Nothing is right. Bad karma? Nomological existence in spades? Maybe it's Murphy's Law. Whatever could go wrong has. If not the whole planet, my world at least has gone to hell in the proverbial handcart. My enemies find it funny. My friends get sick just looking at me, and all who see me coming run and hide. No one wants me in their thoughts. Those about me move on with life as though I had never existed. Clearly, no one wants to catch whatever it is I have. I can hardly blame them.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Consumed by Anger and Regret***

Honestly, I'm worse than merely miserable and shunned, a one-time laughingstock now become a forgotten joke. Anger and indignation have swallowed me whole and will not spew me out. My eyes see only what makes me even angrier. I feast on rage; my belly is full of it. My poisoned spirit reeks like bad breath from the craw of Gehenna. Come to think of it, I even feel a bit righteous about my angry, acrid, smoldering soul. My fury is justified. I've been "provoked." The ancient scriptures say often how even God gets "provoked," and we all know what happens then. It's not pretty. So, if you need a little kindness and compassion, you won't get it from me. Sorry, I've no room in my soul for anyone else's pitiful troubles.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Wasted Life, Anger unto Death**

It's not merely my friends and acquaintances who have tried to blot out my memory and pretend I never lived. I have begun to attempt that as well—forgetting that I ever lived, which is a tad less harsh than regretting I ever lived. That abyss is a "place" familiar to old Jeremiah, the first guy given the nickname "Terror All Around!" He accused God of assault for the way his life got wrecked, trying to be God's prophet and all, and he came to curse the day he was born. I've begun rehearsing those lines of ultimate despair. I've bonded as well with Jonah, another of the Bible's notably "provoked," who witnessed justice completely overturned, by his lights anyway. "Are you right to be so angry?" God asked. "Yes, damn it! Angry enough to die! Take that, God," spat Jonah. So now, in my lament, I shout to the heavens, "My times are in your hands, God—my ruined, miserable, worthless, wasted, never-should-have-lived-them times. Here, take them. They're all yours. Good riddance."



# PROGNOSIS: Grace and Mercy that Redeem Even the Worst of Times

## *Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Taking Everything In Hand*

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o God's own hands, hands that aren't merely immortal, invisible, and metaphorical, but flesh and blood hands as susceptible to sorrow, pain, and waste as our own. With his own hands nailed to the cross that held him pinned between heaven and earth, Jesus, the only-begotten one, prayed these very words with his dying breaths. We dabble in Docetism if we think he didn't also know the thoughts and emotions of everyone who ever saw his or her

life ruined, mocked, consumed with anger and rage, trashed, and wasted. There, hanging between two forgettable losers, he took their lives, and ours, as his own—forever and for always, as his ruined hands and feet would later, and even now, testify. All who hang suspended in a living hell have him for company. So do all who perish and land literally in Gehenna.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Resting in Hands of Faithfulness***

Resting now in those hands, still smelling like hell, we find not only company, but a reason to live, and thankfulness instead of regret at waking up on yet another morning to find our hearts still beating. The hands that held the dying and breathless Jesus, and the face that shined on him, now make a place for us, too, and give us light enough to see beyond our blinding pain, sorrow, and troubles. In this place we know hesed—faithfulness, mercy, lovingkindness—as our most precious and everlasting gift. Hesed covers and comforts us, restores our neighbor-ness. The life we have now isn't only like Christ's. It is his.

### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Our Hands now His Scarred Hands***

He, the risen one now clothed in our baptismally begotten flesh and blood, uses our faces to shine light in the dark places where exhausted souls and broken vessels go to weep in futility. There, through the ears of our hearts he hears and knows the endless laments that proceed from those depths, and with our hands and the gifts of his words we join those old sad songs, join hands, and keep on singing 'til together we get to lines of thanksgiving and bask in the light of the face shining with hesed. Call us "Terror All Around" if you like, but lit like we are now, the only things we scare away are darkness, hate, and despair.