

## *Love in the Streets*

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Pastor Mary Koon

### **Luke 19:28-40**

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.”

Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

### *Prayer*

Love rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday.

The city was crowded that Passover, as thousands of the faithful journeyed to be in the holy city for the festival. They came to worship, ritualize, and remember their ancestors’ liberation from slavery in Egypt.

Looking eastward, toward the Mount of Olives, Jesus descends riding on a borrowed colt. He is surrounded by cheering, joyful disciples. As he passes, the path before him becomes covered with tree branches and coats literally removed from the backs of the people.

Such an exciting moment.

At the same time Jesus comes from the east, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea rides into the city from the west, oozing imperial power, high on a shiny stallion. The spectacle includes Roman soldiers on chariots, horseback and on foot, weapons gleaming.

The two could not be more different.

Empire enters the city, enforcing the illusion of peace with power, violence, suppression. It arrives with pomp and circumstance, weaponry and violence.

Jesus enters the city in humility and love.

Jesus comes riding on a colt, fulfilling the Prophet Zechariah's words, "Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."

He arrives as he always has, open and vulnerable. His disciples' only weapons their clothing and the branches of some nearby trees.

In the disciples' cheers we hear echoes of the multitudes of angels at Jesus' birth who sang "Glory to God in heaven and peace on earth." Outside Jerusalem we hear the multitudes of earthly creatures crying out, "Peace in heaven and glory in heaven." Their cries are irrepressible, spontaneous. God's goodness is the final word. God will not be silenced.

Jesus carefully planned his entry as a highly ritualized symbolic prophetic and political act. He would have known that Pilate would be in Jerusalem keeping the peace because thousands of the faithful journeyed there each year at Passover. He prearranged the colt rental, and he would have known that tradition

held that the Messiah would enter the city from the Mount of Olives. This ride would mark the culmination of his ministry.

Love rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday and still, the people did not understand. Jesus never pretended his way was any way other than God's way of mercy, truth, and love. It was never might makes right.

But Jesus didn't fit the profile of the savior the people had dreamed of for so long. He wasn't a military hero, his power was and is the power to change lives, to show care, to create new people. And yet, the people cry, "Save us now! Hosanna."

Richard Rohr said, "What if we did believe that God comes to save us...to save us from living lives not big enough for our souls...to save us from living lives that are too small."

This week marks the end of the 40 days of Lent, a spiritual housecleaning of sorts - an intentional time of re-orienting our lives toward God and away from self. On Ash Wednesday, when we were marked with ashes, we remembered Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, shoulder-to-shoulder with the people, and as he emerged, God's voice calling him beloved.

Beloved was the knowledge that sustained Jesus for 40 days in the wilderness. Beloved was the voice that empowered him to speak truth to power. Beloved was the word from deep in the cloud on the mountaintop, where Jesus became a dazzling white. This deep, unassailable knowledge of his belovedness overflowed from Jesus in courageous acts of love -- healing, feeding, preaching, praying, welcoming the children, touching the untouchables, forgiving, and honoring women.

The parades on Palm Sunday highlight the difference between the way of Jesus and the way of Caesar – really the way of the world.

The world values power, comfort, and offers the illusion of control, of security, esteem. The things that close us off to the pain in our own hearts and in this world, to the suffering of God's people and the earth. They blind us to the

systems of oppression in which we participate and fools us into believing that somehow we and everyone around us are less than. Less than enough. Less than worthy. Less than fully and completely loved.

The way of Jesus is the way of vulnerable love, which leads to real peace and transformation. This kind of love doesn't turn from the hurt in our hearts or in the world, it doesn't look away when there is suffering.

In Jesus, we know that God enters our pain and journeys with us.

Love sits with a mother at the bedside of a dying child. Love laces up shoes and walks out of the high school to protest gun violence. Love fills the lungs of a weary, worried husband as he breathes with his wife in the ICU. Love rises when it's dark to serve breakfast at Simpson House. Love reunites families at our borders.

Kate Bowler reflects on the humility of Jesus on Palm Sunday and Holy week. She writes, "It is alright to be low. It is alright to be humbled. In fact, there are times when those are the best things to be. When our own world is turned upside down and all we can sense in ourselves is weakness and disappointment, that is when we are closest to the loving God and the miraculous strength that we can call upon." (<https://katebowler.com/a-world-turned-upside-down/>)

Love drives through the streets of Dayton Ohio. Kerwin was my Lyft driver from the airport to the Marriott last summer when I was in Dayton for a conference. He was raised in Trinidad, where he worked as a trainer in forensic police methods. Kerwin and his wife moved from their homeland to the US in order for his wife to give birth to their baby. The doctors told them that they would have a healthy baby girl, but they had a son – they named him Nathan, from the Bible -- who was born with a severe neurological disorder. With this type of illness, the child should not have made it 3 days. With two clubbed feet and the need for 24-hour care, Kerwin said, "God's in charge of life, not the doctors. God's love and grace are greater than anything and I trust." Last summer Nathan turned two years old. Kerwin told me that he used to wonder about the folks he'd see moving their mouths and never speaking, but that's him

now, praying to God constantly, pouring out the love he has for his son, never looking away.

Barbara Brown Taylor says this, “It is an old, old story: Love comes into the world as a little child, fresh from God. When Love grows up, Love feeds people, Love heals people, Love turns things upside down. Love’s actions do not set well with the people in charge. They warn Love to leave well enough alone. Love meets hate, meets politics, meets fear. Love goes on loving, which gets Love killed—not by villains in black hats but by people like us: clergy, patriots, God-fearing folk. What brought them together was their rage at him [at Love] for being less than they wanted him to be—or for being more than they wanted him to be—but in any case for not being who they wanted him to be, and they killed him for it.” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *God in Pain*, p. 125)

I think that there is a temptation on this day, to revel in the “high” of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, go home, go about our business and return next Sunday to the glory of the resurrection.

In her book *Plan B*, Anne Lamott writes, “I don’t have the right personality for Good Friday, for the crucifixion. I’d like to skip ahead to the resurrection. In fact, I’d like to skip ahead to the resurrection vision of one of the kids in our Sunday school who drew a picture of the Easter bunny outside the tomb: everlasting life and a basketful of chocolates! Now you’re talking!”

The high of Palm Sunday cannot sustain us for very long. Power, esteem, popularity and security are simply too small for the transformation of the human heart and the complications of this world. This week, are we willing to let go our need to control our lives and let God be God, trusting the one who claims us as beloved and commands us to be that love for one another? In the willingness to risk, to walk with Jesus in love, may we awaken to new hope on Easter morning.

May it be so. AMEN