

“The Things That Make for Peace”

Luke 19: 28-40

April 13, 2025/ Palm Sunday C

It's Palm Sunday. The beginning of the holiest week of our faith. The day of hosannas, of palm waving, of hope rising. A moment that feels like triumph. Like love is winning. However, we know what's coming. And we suspect Jesus did, too. He rode into the city knowing how this would end. Knowing that the cheers would fade, that love would cost more than anyone imagined. And still, he showed up. “Love does that,” says Kate Bowler. “It moves toward what is hard. It asks for more than we planned to give. It stretches us past what we thought we could bear.”

As we hear Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story, perhaps you noticed there are some things missing. This is one of the few events in Jesus' ministry that is recorded in all four gospels. Luke leaves out the crucial detail of palm-waving. There were no shouts of "hosanna" as Jesus and his disciples walked by. All the fun stuff we attribute to Palm Sunday, the waving of palms and shouting hosanna, isn't recorded in this version. In similar fashion to Christmas pageants, our Palm Sunday celebrations are an amalgamation of pieces strung together for maximum dramatic effect. Luke invites us to explore a more subdued version.

The story begins with Jesus just a couple of miles outside of Jerusalem as the festival of Passover is about to begin. Passover was a tense time in Jerusalem. Of the various religious celebrations in the Jewish calendar, Passover is the one most likely to be a foundation for rebellion. According to Michael Joseph Brown, God's victory over that one ancient oppressive empire would have definitely been on the minds of the Jews who were living under the rule of the corrupt and abusive Roman authorities. Pontius Pilate and his legions would have been in Jerusalem ready to stamp out any sign of revolt. He would have deployed his “peacekeepers,” however their version of peace was hardly peaceful. For them, peace was simply a lack of obvious conflict, the kind of "peace" the victors experience in the aftermath of struggle and bloodshed. Pilate would have ridden into town on a warhorse, broad, strong, and fearless, ready to make the people do whatever he commanded. Jesus' entry, as we know, was decidedly different.

Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem was humble and unassuming. He did not arrive on a beautiful horse, but riding a donkey that he had his disciples borrow. As they approached the city, Jesus sent two of them ahead to retrieve this animal from its owner. He assures them that if anyone questioned them, they were to say, “the Lord needs it” and carry on. Imagine Jesus, a full-grown man, greeting the crowds atop a half-wild colt, surrounded by a ragtag line of peasants, fishermen, prostitutes, and tax collectors. This hardly sounds like a hero's triumphal entry. That is precisely the point. Unlike Pilate's soldiers, his followers didn't have banners to wave. All they had were

the cloaks off their backs, which they threw on the ground as Jesus approached, trying to make a path for the one they hoped was there to finally initiate true peace.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday and approach Holy Week this year, peace weighs heavily on our minds. We long for peace in those places that remain ravaged by war and turmoil. We long for peace in our homes, our universities and the seats of power in our nation. We long for peace within ourselves. Jesus understood what was at stake that day, the city's streets swollen with people from all over the region. It was no accident that he chose this day to initiate the beginning of the end to his ministry, his last hurrah, his final act of civil disobedience.

I'm not sure everyone in the crowd knew what to expect as Jesus came riding into town. Although he had prepared his disciples for this moment, they still did not fully understand that the end was unfolding. The casual observers and hanger-ons in the crowd did not likely get what they had hoped for or expected. They thought Jesus would lead a revolt against Rome. They hoped he had come to liberate them from the oppressive Roman government not liberate their souls. They excitedly praised God "for all the deeds of power that they had seen" and excitedly cried out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." They spoke the truth, even if they did not fully understand the full implication of what they were saying. This king did not come with earthly power to overthrow the empire. This king came not as a conquering hero but as a servant, and he knew all too well how the crowds who hailed him on that day with shouts of "Hosana!" would all too soon shout "Crucify him."

Something happened to this entourage of rag tag followers as they entered the city. The preacher Rev. Nancy Taylor believes "until this day, until this moment, until right now, the followers of Jesus had been just that: followers, largely passive, reflective. They had traipsed after Jesus all over Palestine.

When he argued with civil and religious officials, they watched, tense and riveted. When he defended prostitutes, they gasped. When he conversed in public with a woman from Samaria, they winced. When he defied the Sabbath laws, they cringed. When he declared that the last shall be first, the first last, and the rich poor, they glanced around guardedly to see who was listening. When he kissed lepers and healed those of broken bodies, they whispered in fascinated awe.

Until this day, this moment, until right now," she says, "the followers of Jesus had been just that: followers, largely passive, if keen observers of his ways. But on Palm Sunday, today, a shift occurs, a transformation begins. And the shift? It's seismic."¹

In this moment they were transformed from followers to leaders. For the first time since they have known Jesus, they take up their roles as players and protagonists in the kingdom of God. Something changes in them. I wonder, as we hear the story again does something change in us? In this moment when Empires threaten to squelch the voices of freedom and the spirit of

¹ Rev. Dr. Nancy S. Taylor, "Players and Protagonists in the Kingdom of God," Day1, March 20, 2016

compassion can we too stand up to be instruments not of violence but peace? Jesus confesses that even if we cannot or will not speak on behalf of justice, the stones will cry out on his behalf. The message of unconditional love, acceptance and mercy cannot be contained even by human will or expression.

As Jesus faced his final days on earth it was not death that overwhelmed his thoughts, but peace. We know that death is lurking just around the corner. That day was marked by such hope-filled celebration yet we remember that all too soon the disciple's cowardice will overcome them. Fear will paralyze them as the authorities call for Jesus' death and then come to take him away. These disciples, the ones who seem so joyful and fearless, will ultimately falter in the face of Rome's lethal might.

It would be easy to despair, knowing how quickly and easily everything seems to fall apart. I hope, however, despair is not the lesson that lingers this week. This story also speaks of bravery, the shift that lifts disciples from followers to leaders. William Barclay once observed that there are two kinds of bravery. One is the kind of bravery we exhibit by instinct when we rush to pull a child from in front of an on-coming car. This is the bravery of crisis, a bravery that exists only when you don't really have time to think about what you are doing.

There is another kind of bravery, though, a kind of bravery that sees danger from a long way off and has a little more time to think about how to respond. This kind of bravery knows that danger is coming, but does not change course. This bravery is faithful, enduring great danger in order to complete the mission to which we have been called. This is the kind of bravery Jesus exhibits. This is the kind of bravery Jesus calls the church to embody even today as factions of Christians jockey to establish their authority and power over one another all in the name of Christ. Our call is to bravely continue his ministry of liberating the captives, feeding the poor and tending to the broken and brokenhearted. Perhaps we can see danger far off and still have the courage to stand firm in the Gospel of love and justice. Whenever we are brave, filled with the Spirit, we can engage in the things that decidedly make for peace in our world.

I pray that we would be Palm Sunday disciples standing courageously with Christ, throwing down the coats on *our* backs to make a way for Jesus, shouting praises to the one who promises to build a heavenly peace among us. I pray that we can be both brave like Jesus and celebratory like his disciples. That is how we find the hope that we seek.

Jesus is confident that the message and ministry he has entrusted to his disciples will flourish, despite their all too human responses to the trauma they have and are about to endure. He is confident that nothing can silence them. Even though they may fall away in the moment, they will carry on, standing firm against the powers of death and destruction. If they fail to respond, Jesus assures them that even the stones will cry out. God will make God's witness in whatever way possible

It was on Palm Sunday that the followers of Jesus began to understand just how costly and rigorous the Christian life would be. Rev. Taylor concludes, "you train for it as an athlete trains for a race: rehearsing the virtues, practicing courage, training oneself in kindness, exercising gentleness, working at mercy and generosity. It's a fulltime job, this training and practicing. It is

a way of life,” she submits, “that Palm Sunday has pride of place in all four gospels because it was on Palm Sunday, it was today, that the church was truly born...not in wind and fire...but in courage and in conviction.

This is the day the church found its feet and found its voice and swore allegiance to the Prince of Peace. May the church be born again today, reborn today on Palm Sunday, in me and in you. For Christ’s sake, let’s show the world what God looks like.” May it be so! Amen

Sources:

Katherine Schifferdecker, “Speak the Dream of Peace,” Working Preacher Blog, April 3, 2022.

Rev. Chrissy Cataldo, “Talking Stones: Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2016” Winthrop Congregational Church, March 20, 2016.

Rev. Dr. Chuck Currie, “A Sermon on Luke 19: 28-40: God Vs. Rome,” Sermon blog, April 1, 2007

Rev. Dr. Nancy S. Taylor, “Players and Protagonists in the Kingdom of God,” DayOne, March 20, 2016.