

Palm Sunday, 13 April 2025

St. Luke/San Lucas Episcopal Church

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 19:28-40

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good.

God's Mercy endures forever. Amen.

Please be seated.

Wasn't it fun to have our annual procession of the palms? Walking together. Waving our palm fronds. Celebrating.

Throughout the centuries, spring has been the season of parades, a time when people are finally able to get out of the house, after a long winter. To join together, to socialize, to have fun outside.

Our gospel is set during this time of year. As the Jewish people gather together for the Passover celebration, there are streams of people arriving in Jerusalem from all over the country. Some are probably devout, highly religious people, pilgrims coming to celebrate their most holy days at the temple, the dwelling place of God. Others may have been traveling more to see family, a chance to catch up with grandma, to see cousins, to share a meal with extended family and friends.

Entering the city from the west likely was the great procession of Pontius Pilot, representative of the ruling Roman government in the territory of Israel. Traveling from his seaside palace up to Jerusalem for the holidays, Pilot would have been accompanied by his soldiers, some mounted on horses or in chariots, others marching in formation. This parade would also likely have included the extensive household staff and other retainers, in addition to Pilot, his immediate family, and other key representatives who wanted to be close to power.<sup>1</sup>

Can't you just imagine the thunderous sound of all those horses and chariots and marching soldiers? Sun flashing off the rich robes and gleaming armor. An awesome show of wealth, or power, of military might.

---

<sup>1</sup> Borg, Marcus, Crossan, John Dominic. The Last week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Final Day in Jerusalem

Lining the roads would have been local residents and pilgrims, many perhaps pushed off of the path, their own travels disrupted, to make way for the representatives of this occupying force. Shouts of Ave, Hail, were likely heard as the group passed by. Acknowledgement of their power. Respect, perhaps. Fear, certainly. Admiration or love, unlikely.

From the other side of town, another group joined with the pilgrims streaming into Jerusalem. At the head of this parade was Jesus, a carpenter and teacher from the countryside. Riding not on a warhorse or in a chariot, but on the back of a colt, a young donkey. Accompanied by his closest friends, the disciples and the women.

As Jesus and his group passed by, the people recognized him and began to react. They pulled off palm branches, waving the fronds as makeshift flags and banners along the way. Spreading the cloaks they were wearing onto the ground to make a path for Jesus as he passed by. Singing. Praising God joyfully with a loud voice. Calling out, Hosannah. Hosannah.

My Hebrew is poor and my Aramaic non-existent, so please forgive the pronunciation, but this cry, Hosannah, or hosi-ah-na, is not a cheer, rather it is an ancient SOS, a cry of “Please, save me” or even “Save me now!”<sup>2</sup>

And what were these people asking, pleading for Jesus to save them from? Poverty. Oppression. An occupying authority that was directing them to live in a way that differed from the teachings of their God. That was dividing them. That was focused on gathering wealth and power, rather than on the well-being of the population. What was it that the people were crying out for?

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

Peace. A King who comes, not to enrich himself, to raise himself up, to conquer and defeat, but a ruler who comes in the name of the Lord, to heal, to protect, to lead his people back to God.

We think of this as a celebration, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, but perhaps it is better viewed as a counter demonstration, a protest march, a search by desperate people for salvation.

I think this has been on my mind as we’ve been having a number of protest marches, demonstrations and rallies, ourselves, including several recent gatherings at Esther Short Park, and I expect more in the days to come.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bulter Bass, Diana. Hosanna, Not Alleluia, <https://day1.org> Episode #4177

The events thus far have been peaceful, celebratory even, as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was peaceful. I pray that they remain so. But at these recent events, I have also seen a lot of anger. Anger in the signs. Anger in the chants. Anger in the faces of people who have reached the end of their rope.

And I understand. I find myself hitting the angry emoji in response to posts and news much more often than I hit the like button, much less the heart or caring signs. And there is a lot to be angry about. There is a lot to fear. There is a lot of chaos in our world today.

Yet, as I am in the midst of these gatherings, my mind is drawn back to the Civil Rights Pilgrimage we took last fall, to the number of speakers who shared their experiences, to the role the churches played in their protests.

Churches were gathering spots where people could come together to decide on a way forward. Churches were places where training in nonviolence took place. Churches were where people grappled with whether to protest, what to protest, how to protest. And churches were places where people learned to sing, to sing songs of redemption, of community, of support, songs that cried out for a better world, for mercy, for justice, for peace. Churches were where people came together to pray, to pray for wisdom, for respect, for strength. Churches were sanctuaries of hope, where people came for a glimpse of a better world, what the world could be, what the world was meant to be.

And yes, because of this work, churches also became targets, targets for hatred, for violence. In Birmingham, we visited the historic 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, where four young girls were killed in a bombing attack on Youth Sunday.

Protests, resistance to evil, can be dangerous. It requires courage. Jesus knew that. As he traveled into Jerusalem, he was well aware that there would be opposition to his message of love and peace, of inclusion and respect. Opposition from those with governmental power. Opposition from religious leaders. Opposition from ordinary people afraid that what little they had would be taken away.

Jesus knew this, yet he traveled on. And when the Pharisees challenged him, calling out to have the disciples stop, to be quiet, to not make waves, Jesus' response was clear, If these were silent, the stones would shout out. If we are silent, the stones will shout out.

As we go forth into this summer, we will be confronted with gatherings, with parades, with rallies. There will be those designed to impress, with military might and shows of force. There may be those that erupt, where people pushed to the limit and beyond, let loose all their anger and hurt.

I hope and pray there will be another sort of gathering as well. Demonstrations, rallies, marches, filled with singing, filled with praying, filled with nonviolent mutual support. Participants with signs that call on us to be our better selves. That call for justice for all. That call for inclusion and affirmation and respect. Signs that recognize that all of us are in need of hosannah, of salvation from the chaos which surrounds us.

This summer, we will be gathering with our fellow Episcopal Churches in Clark County for celebrations in Esther Short Park. We will be there for Juneteenth, for Pride in the Park, for the Peace and Justice Fair. The deacons plan to be present at other events as well.

The questions I leave us with today are these, which marches will we join? Which parades will we attend? What signs will we carry and which songs will we sing? Will we stand with the marginalized, the oppressed, or will we bow before the worldly powers of our times? Will it be our shouts of hosannah, God save us, that heard, or will it be the stones that cry out to God for peace?

Amen.