

Palm/Passion Sunday (NL Yr 1)

March 29, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown

Readings: Mat. 21: 1-17

Grace and peace to you from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

“Modern people [like us] swim in a sea of “spectacle,” — the use of compelling or provocative public presentations to shape imaginations”¹ and inspire allegiance. Think of the 21 gun salute and soulful playing of taps or July Fourth celebrations. On a totally different spectrum, think of the hype of the Super Bowl, or the tragic posting of barbaric acts on public media by terrorist. “The ancient Romans [,masters of spectacle,] used gladiator games, veneration of the emperor, and public crucifixion of criminals as tools to convey the message that Rome’s”² power was absolute, divinely ordained, and not-to-be-defied. “Even Israel’s prophets had used spectacular public enactments to bring their message more powerfully to light.”³

Though Jesus performed many a spectacular miracle, it was never to draw attention to himself. It was always to display the love, power and will of God and draw our attention to God’s mission to save all of creation. However, Jesus deploys spectacle as he and his followers join the throng of pilgrims entering Jerusalem at Passover. He choreographs his approach to Jerusalem to resemble the coming of a conquering hero or king throughout the Mediterranean world.”⁴ If the people of Jerusalem follow the script, they would come out to honor the visiting dignitary, waving palm branches and laying them on the road with cloaks, like the red carpet at a premiere. On this day, they do just that and add “Hosanna to the Son of David!... ‘Save us’ Son of David”... and maybe, “Save us successor of King David” The crowd chants from psalm 118, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” It becomes a spontaneous pageant to welcome a savior, a king. Be sure both Roman and Jewish authorities noticed and prepared to defend the status quo and their authority from any challenges from this prophet and rabbi from Galilee.

Maybe those who welcomed him as Savior-king were further encouraged when Jesus turned out the money changers and those selling or buying sacrificial animals in the temple. When Jesus quotes a part of Jeremiah’s scathing temple sermon, he’s challenging the whole sacrificial system and those who would piously participate in it, but, outside the temple, show no mercy to others and no respect for God’s commands in their own behavior. Jesus was contesting not only those who served the “business” of Temple sacrifices, but anyone who put on the mask of holiness and then exclude the sick, the poor, the Gentiles. Jesus turns over any human-constructed barriers that would get in the way of someone’s entry into the worship and presence of God. Instead, he welcomes and

heals the blind and lame who seek him out. The children cheer, “Hosanna to the Son of David” The chief priest and scribe ask Jesus if he hears this scandalous king talk, right here in the Temple where only God is to be praised. Jesus responds “Out of the mouth of babes...” The children seem to see what the leaders do not.

This Triumphal Entry we celebrate today is overflowing with contradictions. Jesus joins in a festival parade usually proffered for a king. They shout “Hosanna Son of David” “here is the one sent by God to deliver us from Roman oppression.” Yet the Son of God arrives on a humble, borrowed donkey, without an army but with a power that refuses to use violence or force. He seems to be both proclaiming his kingship and “mocking the conventions of power.”⁵ Jesus enters the Temple, a core of Hebrew worship and identity, not to claim the prestige or position of a priest but as a rebel and prophet who pushes aside any of the sacred traditions and rituals that get in God’s way of drawing all people to the Lord. By the end of the day, as they head out to Bethany, did anyone but Jesus realize what had happened? He had ridden as a king into the city that would kill him. The Son of God cleanses the Temple whose leaders will orchestrate his demise. The crowd that enthusiastically greeted him with “Hosanna, Son of David” will, in mere days, yell, “Crucify him”.

Palm Sunday is a rather messy festival. It’s a festival with pomp and excitement and clouds foreshadowing Jesus rejection, betrayal and execution. It’s messy just like life.... just like our lives. “Our joys are mingled with our sorrows, and our sorrows are mixed with moments of joy.. Courage, heroism and hope mingle with sin, fear and evil.”⁶ We’re so blessed but also so broken in places Through science and technology we are able to save and extend life and still one man could commit suicide and kill a plane full of innocents. We’re embraced forever in God’s grace at baptism but still struggle to feel confident, lovable, or forgiven enough to be the disciples and church God created us to be. We grieve the death of Wayne Wentz who gave so much to us and we celebrate the births of a new grandchild and great grandchild. Our lives are complicated. And like that day Jesus entered Jerusalem and the Temple, Palm and Passion Sunday declares our Lord comes into our complicated lives, our suffering, sin and celebrations to stand beside us with his life-giving presence and power.

Hear the good news. “Palm and Passion Sunday reminds us that God’s love is the only thing that makes sense out of human suffering, conflict and tragedy. God’s love doesn’t explain it all way; it just make those things more possible to bear”⁷ as we hold on to God’s love, as we count on God’s hands to bring healing and wholeness where we can only see holes and tragedy. “Everyone loves a parade, but life has its moments of Passion

that cuts us to the bone.” We need not pretend that life is a perfect parade but we are not prisoners of despair or doom either. “Yet our lives are not a relentless cycle of “Hosannas” and shouts of “Crucify Him” because we can live in hope and confront the difficult realities because we know the truly final words are “[Hallelujah.] He is Risen”⁸

Pray with me: Dear Lord,
Keep us with you as you enter the gates greeted by cheers.
Keep us with you as you teach and talk and debate and overturn.
Keep us with you as you sup and pray.
Keep us with you as you give yourself and hurry the others away.
Keep us with you as you stand accused with none to defend you.
Keep us with you as you are sentenced, beaten, and led away.
Keep us with you as you climb your ugly throne.
Keep us with you as you are jeered and derided.
Keep us with you as you cry aloud.
Keep us with you as you die upon that tree...
....That we may have life, all because you have kept us with you. Amen.⁹

Linda M Alessandri 3/28/15

ENDNOTES

1. Stanley Saunders, “Commentary on Matthew 21: 1-17 posted on www.workingpreacher.org

2. Saunders

3. Saunders

4. Saunders

5. Saunders

6. Marek Zabriskie, “Everyone Loves a Parace” posed on www.Day1.org for April 13, 2014

7. Zabriskie

8. Zabriskie

9. David Lose, dated April 1, 2012 as posted on <http://www.davidlose.net/2012/04/palmpassion-sunday/>