

Sermon April 10 2022 Palm Sunday Brent

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 19:29-39:

When Jesus and the disciples had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, Jesus 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 Jesus 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 Jesus, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Luke 22:7-14:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' " He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.

SERMON: "How and Why" The Rev. Brent Damrow

I have been taught this. I have learned this. I understand this. And that is that the *what* of life matters. The *what* of life matters profoundly. What we know. What we believe. What we commit ourselves to. What we build. What we call family (*looks at congregation*). What we call home (*looks at sanctuary*). What we eat (*looks at communion table*). What we give to (*looks at offering plates*). All of it matters profoundly.

And yet the longer I live, the longer I serve as pastor, the longer I follow Christ, I am convinced of this: that while the *what* does matter, it is the *how* and the *why* of life -- that undergirds all those *whats* -- that matters so much more. Not just what we believe, but how we live into it that ends up mattering. Not only what we build or serve, but how we engage and why we do them that transform them into sacred practices. How we treat one another and make our home

together. Why we gather at this communion table, or share our time, treasure and talent. The *whys* and the *hows* make all the difference.

Today both of our readings are about a crazy world turned upside down. They are also profoundly about a particular *what*. In that procession into Jerusalem, and in our processional today in our world, it is about something so visible, and that *what* is power. Make no mistake about it. When we put hosanna on the lips of children, Palm Sunday is a day dripping with power. Not just *what*, but *how* and *why*. And Luke brings that into clearer focus than any other gospel writer. Luke, in fact, says it was because of the deeds of power of Jesus, the one riding on that donkey. It was because people knew those deeds. They had heard about those deeds. They had witnessed those deeds, maybe even been a part of them. That's why they showed up on the street to shout hosanna in defiance of the Roman Empire. They showed up there to wave their palms, to throw down their cloaks. Power matters. Our hearts break right now to think about how that power is being used. And quite frankly, not just the power, but the how and why.

On that weekend in Jerusalem, the reason for the second reading today, when people came from all corners of the earth, they were coming to celebrate and to remember Passover, the story of God's deliverance. The story of freedom in unlikely ways, of wholeness in impossible situations, and on journeys that may take a long time but end up getting us to the Promised Land one way or another.

And you need to know that on that Palm Sunday, there was more than one parade on the streets that weekend. There was more than one procession besides that multitude of disciples. There was definitely the one that we remember today, that history remembers today, that the whole world pauses for. We remember this procession of palms and cloaks honoring the coming of the King. But there was another one, too. You see, the power of the time – Rome – knew all about this celebration of Passover, that story when the people were delivered from an empire. And so it made them nervous. Rome wanted to make sure the people of Jerusalem knew what power was. So they staged their own procession that weekend, too, out of the opposite gate into the city. From that other gate, instead of a donkey and disciples taking off cloaks to throw on the ground, came soldiers gleaming in polished breastplates, with sharpened swords and spears, riding on top of stallions draped in armor, hooves pounding the ground, stares level and harsh. All of it, make no mistake, sending a message of power, saying to the people 'you stay down, you keep quiet, you serve us.' And I imagine that the people of Jerusalem showed up, not to see, because they had seen it before, but afraid what might happen to them if they weren't seen there. I imagine that the people got the message of all that power loud and clear, even if that power ended up stoking resentment and resistance. Even if it reminded the people of how unjust it all was. And even if it reminded them just how much they wanted that kingdom to end.

The *how* of that power was crude and vicious. The *why* had nothing to do with any of the people – well, except for those precious few clinging to power. But you know what? That power of something even as mighty as Rome could not -- it would not -- last, no matter how brazen the display. In fact, few people even remember to this day that there was such a procession walking down those streets. For that procession and all who were part of it have faded into nothing.

But the parade we remember – make no mistake – there was power to behold. No stallions to be seen, only the foal of a donkey, the humble symbol of true peace. The very coming to life of an ancient prophecy from Zechariah that proclaimed peace not just for the in crowd, not just for the people in the Holy City, not even just for the people of Israel, but for the whole world. For all nations. Can you imagine? And on that donkey rode, as the people shouted out, a real King. Not as we traditionally know one, for Jesus never even had a home let alone a palace. But the kind of king, the kind of ruler, the kind of power that God imagines – a leader who serves, a leader who heals, a leader who gives, a leader who empties everything. Not ever for his or her own sake, but instead for the sake of life, of fullness for all people.

And so as Luke says, I can imagine the people on that day, can you? I can imagine that it was so exciting being part of that, that they could not contain their joy. That they ended up going to march in this parade. That what they did was not calculated but spontaneous. It was not to play a part for someone else, but instead to enter the play themselves. It was not to be subject to any kingdom, but instead to claim their full place in the Kin-dom of Heaven itself.

Luke mentions they showed up for all those deeds of power. What deeds of power could compel such a display?

Let's not forget Peter's mother-in-law made right.

Or that blind man who was given sight.

Don't forget about Zacchaeus in that tree.

Or that abundant catch after which Jesus said Follow me.

Don't ever forget the One from whom legions of demons fled.

Or the thousands upon thousands who were fed.

Or, right. Don't forget the widow's son raised from the dead.

Don't forget the teachings that astounded the mind.

Or those sinners to whom Jesus was so wonderfully kind.

Don't forget the comfort and the care,

The restoration, and all people lifted from despair.

You see, it's not the *what* of power that mattered to the people on that day.

Instead it was the humble, serving, life-giving, restorative healing power of Christ's way.

It was *how* Jesus honored every single person, and the *why* behind it, because of something we say all the time here: Each of you is God's beloved, made in God's own image. Not for anything you have ever done or will ever do. But instead simply because you are. And that's where power comes in. The people responded even if only for a moment, and yet it was enough. Because you showed up! Here we are! Remembering thousands of years later.

In just a moment, we'll remember another gift of power, not from Palm Sunday, but from a day we face this week, a day we know as Maundy Thursday. The day the powers of betrayal and denial would conspire with Rome, even among Jesus' very disciples. And yet this communion table, just like this day, will become power that lasts, power that uplifts, power that helps us endure whenever the powers of earth do their worst. Here at this very table with his disciples, Jesus remembered what was, even while giving us all the gift of *how* or *why*.

This (*raises the bread*), Jesus said, is my body. I give thanks for it. I bless this bread. I cherish it. For it is my body, it is my life, it is what I have shown you throughout my ministry, and what I'm about to show you in these coming days. I've shown you that I have taken this bread, my life, and I have broken it open for you. I want you to do the same. Take your lives, take all you have and break it open, that life might spread.

We remember that it was later in the supper that Jesus took a cup, and he said this cup is the Cup of the New Covenant. It is my life force. And it is the *why* of this meal. It is poured out for you for forgiveness of all of your sins, all of them. Do this in remembrance of me. Take your life force. Take your own cup and pour it out in gestures of forgiveness for the whole world, whether people deserve it or not. For it is this cup that I share with you on this day.

Friends, make no mistake. These palms, these elements, are all about power. Not just what power is, but *how* we show it and *why* it matters. May we remember that today that we might live into it every day. Yes, for the glory of God, but even more so for the love of neighbor, too. For the message of Holy Week and Easter is that we don't just watch Jesus or tell about *his* deeds of power. But we follow and become that very power to heal the blind, to comfort the hurting, to free the greedy and corrupt, and yes, even raise the dead.

Friends, come. For there is much to be done. Amen!