

Squamish United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard  
Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

Scripture  
Luke 19: 29-42a

## **Palm Sunday**

Well here we are at palm Sunday. If you have spent much time in church you know it's the day when we wave the palm branches.

I love a good Palm parade. I have always wanted to do one in which a donkey actually carried 'Jesus' into the sanctuary but I have not found the church willing to do that yet.

All of us ministers have been trying to figure out how to do this Sunday right (let alone next weekend). Palm Sunday is one of those Sundays of the year where life always hits me smack in the face. This year I didn't need to smack quite as significantly because we are living in a time where we have been forced to stop and take notice in a different way already.

I remember last year vividly I laid different materials along the aisle of the church representing coats being thrown on the ground, we held streamers and cheered and sang loudly.

I'm always a little disappointed in palm Sunday at the same time I think it is those evangelical roots in me that want people to jump up and dance and cheer but we United Church folks are much too advanced for that sort of thing so we stand and give a little wave.

But I imagine the chants of the expectant, even jubilant crowd. I picture a spectacle, a celebration, loud cheering maybe something like we are seeing every night at 7pm. People shouting giving thanks for their hero's of the day. That's how people were feeling about Jesus. They were waving and celebrating this 'king of kings' who was going to throw down the empire and be their salvation.

But the thing is I get worked up in the celebration with an ache in my heart and a churning gut because we know the dramatic irony of this moment is that those who are today shouting "Hosanna, Hosanna" will later cry out "crucify him!"

Why? How does that happen? It happens the same way it happens for hero's today only this was more brutal and concrete and 'in your face.'

The irony is that the crowds expected a different kind of king, a different kind of Messiah, they were not looking for humility and love from their leader they wanted vengeance, power, a literal upheaval of the authority and Jesus just brought love and grace and mercy - where's the power in that?

We might get it today but “Their disappointment is heartfelt and, truth be told, it’s understandable.

As is ours.

Let’s be honest. Really honest here. Today, right now.

Isn’t that what we are longing for? A God who is strong, someone who will come in to whatever challenges or situations we are facing like a knight on a horse to save the day?” Not a humble rag tag guy on a donkey.

Particularly now, with fear coursing across the globe.

We are watching our political leaders right now more closely than ever before (partly because they are more available to listen to than ever before)

And lets be honest. I hear hope from some people and judgement from others. One minute we like what they are saying and the next moment we can turn on a dime. We expect them to have answers and fixes to our problems, our health, economic, social, physical, spiritual crisis NOW. We want the answer and we want it fixed and if we don’t get what we want people start raging.

I have a group of friends that have started a Bonnie Henry fan club I swear - I have jumped on the train too and it is not only because she has GREAT shoes. It’s because I see her wisdom, her calm, her resolve. And I recall the first time she teared up just a little as she spoke of her worries and some thought how humble, how beautiful and others responded with “I expect more strength, don’t make me worry because you are worried.” I want a strong powerful leader.

Why? because we need a saviour, we are scared, we are in trauma and we are in crisis. Some of us don’t know how we will survive this. And I am sure it is just like it was in Jesus’ day - there are those who are not significantly effected and so some are just watching the day go by and some would have watched the parade go by as sneer at the noise makers.

So it’s made me really wonder would we/I have reacted any differently than the crowds who hail Jesus’ entrance as the one who will rescue them and who later reject Jesus’ offer not to rescue but instead to redeem them through his own and complete identification with their suffering?

I’m not sure we’re any more faithful, than these fickle crowds who play significant roles in both the Palm Sunday and Passion readings. I don’t say it to condemn us, but rather simply to remind us that God chooses another way. As hard as it is for many of us to hear God chooses to meet us in our vulnerability, to accept us in our weakness, to love us in our un-lovability, to redeem us amid our sin.

Why? Because Jesus is the embodiment of God’s profound love for the world – all the world, the righteous and unrighteous, the repentant and unrepentant, the religious and irreligious, the healthy and the sick, the wealthy and the poor, the employed and the unemployed, those who greet him as Messiah and those who reject him as criminal. It doesn’t matter Jesus shows up for every one of us. “the good, the bad and everyone in between.”

“Yes, the irony between the jubilant cries on Palm Sunday and the bloodthirsty screams a few days later is poignant, even bitter. But perhaps the greater irony is that Jesus still came, embracing their shifting character and faithless temperament, reaching out for those who were about to do all kinds of harm out of fear, those who hailed him as Messiah until the requirement was too great and then denounced him as overly demanding or at least ignored him as well-intentioned but hopelessly idealistic. Jesus came for them.” (David Lose)

So here we are again only today actually the crisis seems all too real. Every one of us is in this. No matter our race, religion, socio-economic status, gender or personality trait. Sure it significantly effects some more than others depending on your race, the country you live in and your socio-economic status in particular but we have seen the richest of the rich be impacted. The powerful who are above anyone else are being humbled even if they can't admit it out loud. The irony is that even if we are above calling on God many are giving it a 'shot now.' And the thing that is beyond almost all human comprehension of love is that God welcomes and loves us anyway.

Just like Jesus entering Jerusalem while people waved the palms God comes to us – in vulnerability and weakness and walks with us. The holy embraces us in our lost places. It's not what many of us desire. We want a fix, and God will offer one but it may not be the immediate answer our impatient hearts desire. And God knows that but God comes anyway, committed to loving us no matter the cost.

So what that means for us today even in the midst of this global pandemic is that I have to believe and I have experienced it in indescribable ways - God is with us and for us through this crisis and all the others in our lives. And God is calling upon us to take up that promise to believe in the hope, love and light so that we together will become stronger and build a better world, a healthier world, a world based on love not power and greed. So wave your palm branches in whatever fashion you might so that you too might live in hope of the new kingdom come.

Amen.