

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Palm Sunday

April 14, 2019

Scriptures
Mark 2:21-28
Luke 19:28-40

A Palm Sunday Service of Reflection
FIVE DAYS BEFORE FRIDAY

(after each reading lay a bright coloured piece of fabric down the aisle)

“A cheering, chanting, dizzy crowd had stripped the green trees bare,
And hailing Christ as king aloud, waved branches in the air.
They laid their garments in the road and spread his path with palms
and vows of lasting love bestowed with royal hymns and psalms.

We stand on the threshold of Holy Week. Before contemplating the Love unfolding in the events of Holy Week, we re-visit significant moments in the life of Jesus and hold them in our hearts until we are seeing through the eyes of Love.

BIRTH

Reading: Luke 2:1-8 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

O for wonder and surprise.
O for hope and delight.

O for the breaking in of God among us. As the poet says
“He is not standing afar off waiting for us to draw nigh, but is a God who sought us out,
striving ever to enter, trying doors, strategically planning
making himself as small as a child
and lying down on the doorstep of the world.” (Walt Whitman) The Mystery of Christmas breaks
in with Love.

BAPTISM & BLESSING

Reading: Luke 3: 21-23 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;[a] with you I am well pleased.”

God is not out there. God is here among us

God enters the world in one Child, and in every child.
God's presence is enfolded into every element of life.
Luke gives us this picture of the Spirit of God funnelled into the universe in the form of a dove,
the most ordinary of birds.
And we have the words that claimed and cherished Jesus "You are my Own, my beloved."
God is not out there.
God is "the beat behind the being of all things" God is with us.
We are close to the heartbeat of Life
Listen closely and this week you will surely hear:
You are my beloved. You are my delight.

CALL

Reading: Luke 5:1-11 "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."
"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

That 30 year old young adult who went public in a splash of light and love, still calls disciples to
a path of compassion and love.
Compassion is to be moved inwardly.
It is a "quivering of the heart" or a stirring in the gut.
"Whatever God does, the first outburst is always compassion."

The practice of compassion is never easy. It is a commitment, but it often takes us where we
don't want to go, or claims space we don't want to give, or costs more than we'd like.
Compassion is a commitment.
How do we follow?

HEALER

Reading: Luke 6: 6-12
And on a Sabbath, the disciples are with Jesus in the synagogue.
The watchers are here.
Also present is a man suffering with a withered hand.

Facing controversy head on, Jesus asks:
"Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" And he calls
to the man and commands: Stretch out your hand.

And his hand was restored.
Human need, suffering, takes priority over sacred ritual.
Jesus doesn't condemn Sabbath practice. The tradition is important. He upholds this. He does
redefine what is most important.
People. Human need. Real Encounter.
This week as we find ourselves standing in the midst of human need, real encounters, we know
we are created for such a time as this.

PARABLE-MAKER

Reading: Luke 13: 18-22

Jesus was always talking about the kingdom of God that is here now, yet not fully here, especially in his parables. It was a way of inviting us to use our imaginations to imagine what God's beloved community, might look like so we would recognize it — right here in our own lives. Parables help us glimpse the Kingdom of God that is beyond us, within us, among us - yet not fully here.

We may think of the Kingdom of God as a place we go to after we die, if we have been good. Perhaps it is. I believe, along with the mystic teacher Cynthia Bourgault, that the kingdom of God is “not a place you go to, but a place you come from.”

“It's a whole new way of looking at the world, a transformed awareness that literally turns the world into a different place.” - Cynthia Bourgault

Imagine. We come from the Kingdom of God, God's beloved community, and we are born into this world. Perhaps the memory of this “place”, this consciousness remains in us: That's how we know beauty and love when we see it, that's how the Kingdom of God is among us because we are fragments of God's beloved community.

Maybe the kingdom of God is a like a kaleidoscope, made of beautifully coloured fragments that twist and turn into patterns that allow us to glimpse Love beyond us, Love among us, Love between us, Love within us.

ON THE ROAD: FIERCELY LOVED

Luke 13:31-35

Jesus calls Herod a fox. It's an acknowledgement that the world is not always a safe place. Bad things happen. There is suffering, calamity and tragedy. There is illness, heartache and death. Jesus response is lament. And he offers one of the most beautiful images in scripture.

How often have I longed to gather my children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

He didn't exactly pick a big strong bird to counter a fox! (A hen? Really!)

Jesus means what he says. It's all about Love. His wasn't a random death. He steadfastly faced Jerusalem, lamenting and in love.

We are loved with a Love that will never let go; a love that re-makes us not because we did anything wrong, but because God's deepest desire is for us to know know our own belovedness.

READING: “**Coming to the City Nearest You**” written by contemporary Canadian poet Carol Penner.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you. Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue, to houses prepared for wedding parties, to the pools where people wait to be healed, to the temple where lambs are sold, to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight. He comes to the governor's palace.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you, to new subdivisions and trailer parks, to penthouses and basement apartments,

to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,
to the big box outlet centre and to churches, with the same old same old message, unchanged
from the beginning of time.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you with his Good News and...

Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!

The very stones cry out,

“Hosanna in the highest,

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The crowds jostle and push,

they can’t get close enough!

People running alongside flinging down their coats before him! Jesus, the parade marshal,
waving, smiling.

The paparazzi elbow for room,

looking for that perfect picture for the headline,

“The Man Who Would Be King”.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you and gets the red carpet treatment.

Children waving real palm branches from the florist, silk palm branches from Wal-mart, palms
made from green construction paper. Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals, in
monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.

King Jesus, honored in a thousand hymns

in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.

We LOVE this great big powerful capital K King Jesus coming in glory and splendor and
majesty and awe and power and might.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you. Kindly, he takes a towel and washes feet.

With majesty, he serves bread and wine.

With honour, he prays all night.

With power, he puts on chains.

Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state

in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan, the crack addict, asking for one cup of cold water,

one coat shared with someone who has none,

one heart, yours,

and a second mile.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.

Can you see him?

[Silence]

Here we are on the first sabbath of Holy week. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem I imagine more of a
protest than a parade. I imagine today his followers would hold up signs and placards stating
things like “He’s the One,” “Down with Rome,” “King of Peace,” “Love over power,” “He even
loves me.” This is the day that Jesus enters the city to clearly confronts the empire and submit to
the results. He could no longer watch the forces of evil oppress the majority. With Passover due,

Pilate with his Roman legion are marching into Jerusalem from Caesarea to the west, arms clattering, swords glinting in the sun, the thunder of hooves and chariots meant to intimidate, to quell any thought of an uprising with the huge crowds visiting the Holy City. Simultaneously, from the east, as clear a counterpoint as you could imagine, Jesus enters, not on a war stallion, unarmed, not to intimidate but to unmask the powers, to conquer evil and hate with mercy and love.

We get a little confused with this day because "Hosanna!" isn't actually a cheer. It's a prayer, meaning something like "Lord, help, please," or "Help us now." What was the tone of the Hosannas on Palm Sunday, as habituated as the people were by the Romans to stay quiet? Today's Give it a Rest theme can speak to a few things. "Give it a Rest" might be a protest sign demanding the empire stop oppressing, never letting up. The pressure is always on. There is a matrix of oppression with education, prison, poverty, lack of decent wages, good jobs and high costs of living. The poor never Catch a break. Jesus rides in on an ass, mocking Rome's fine parades and spectacle and says, "Give them a break for once. For once, just let up and let them breathe." (silence)

So of course they killed him. Imagine what a parade it would be if the poor ever got to rest, if they ever caught a break!

This is the day where we remember that privilege and the insatiable need for "more" is oppression for those who then have no option but to be busy in order to survive. The poorest and the planet suffer. Our salvation our "hosannas" are tied to the liberation and well being of ALL.

And why did Jesus ride? Not to spark the great "Ride On, King Jesus!" but to make a symbolic point. He'd walked all over the countryside! He rode clearly to say I'm the one you read about in Zechariah 9:9. He didn't holler "I'm the king!" He didn't have to after this. Jesus is no a-political sweetie. He eagerly embraces the most political of titles, flaunting it in the face of big King Herod and huge King the Emperor Tiberius. He's a different kind of king, one who threatens the political status quo. Jesus mustered immense courage, entering the city he had wept over for killing the prophets (13:31-35), exposing himself, unarmed, to the powers feeling very threatened by his entry. In Luke, the people get it: Instead of "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," they cry "Blessed is the King who comes..." Wow.

The commandment to keep the sabbath is one that might not seem as important as the one about not murdering. But what, and who, suffers in our society when we value economic security over well-being? As we give witness yet again to the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, proclaiming justice for the oppressed, we must also proclaim justice and peace... and rest... for the weary of this world. Today we might ask what systems of our time are the "old wineskins" that need to "give it a rest" or be "put to rest" that are harming and oppressing "the least" among us? At the end of this series, I wonder what "Sabbath" practices have you experienced that made a difference in our quality of life, the quality of the planet, the quality of our time with, and love for, one another? Might we claim them as our "new wineskins" and not just for Lent?

