

Home Church Package – Sunday, Mar 28 2021 – Lent 6

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Hello to everyone who reads this Take Home message. I hope it helps you celebrate and recognize Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. I have sent you a full sermon that I preached on for Inlet United Church's online worship service on YouTube. It can be found on the Golden Ears United YouTube channel. Please forgive the grammatical errors. I have written so that it could also be read out loud easily.

Take a few breaths and quite yourself for worship.

Opening Prayer

Journeying Jesus, enter our lives
and open us to the gifts residing
deep within the Holy Darkness of our lives.
Help us to be with and for each other
as the crowd that day offered their presence for you.
In your many holy names, we pray. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 19: 28-40 (NRSV)

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he 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 he 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 him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Reflection

Let's imagine ourselves just outside Jerusalem.

We are with Jesus and his band of disciples early in the morning.

For 3 years, we have heard his teaching, parables and questions.

- God's love for all people...inclusion of all people....

- We have been given Hope...of a new kind of Kingdom

- Not led by domination of the Romans...but by love and equity of all people...not just the wealthy and powerful.

- Jesus calls it the Kingdom of God.

Something is different about today.

Jesus has summoned a donkey to ride into Jerusalem.

There is no saddle, some of us put our coats on the donkey for Jesus to sit.

We start down the road that leads to Jerusalem.

We walk alongside Jesus...we are thinking, Jesus is #1, Jesus is #1

At first it is quiet...the only sound is the donkey's hooves clomping on the road...dust rises...we are thirsty as we walk.

- The wind blows through the olive trees.

- We don't have any idea what Jesus has planned.

Then we hear something up ahead. What is it?

A crowd is gathering, people are cheering for Jesus. Palm branches are waving.

- People are taking their coats and spreading them on the dusty road.

They are making a carpet, as if for a King.

They welcome Jesus as if he were a King being welcomed to the capital.

More and more people join our parade as we descend the hill.
As we walk excitement builds. We shout and dance.
Our voices echo across the valley
- "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"
- "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!"

Some Pharisees who have been part of the crowd are getting uncomfortable.
They rush up to Jesus and sternly warn him...

"Teacher.....you must order everyone to be quiet.
The Pharisees are afraid of Jesus causing a scene
The Pharisees know if the Romans see us proclaiming Jesus as king, they will kill us,
they will kill Jesus...Caesar is the Roman King...and to say otherwise puts our lives in
danger"

Jesus refuses to silence us. He says,
"If they are silent, even the rocks, will start shouting!"
- we have reached a tipping point, we can't be quiet now, we can't keep quiet any
longer.

Our parade continues.
We shout louder than ever.
"Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

- After 3 years of following Jesus and learning from him, it feels as if things are finally
reaching a climax.
- We round a bend, and there is Jerusalem before us, the Temple and all the sellers at
the temple... glistening in the hot sun.

- A reverent silence descends upon our parade. We go from celebration to a hushed
silence together.
- Jesus is not only quiet...he begins to weep...to cry
- We gather around him and he begins to speak

Jesus says,
"If only you knew on this day of all days the things that lead to peace...but you can't
see. A time will come when your enemies will surround you, and you will be crushed
and this whole city levelled...all because you didn't recognize the meaning of this
moment of God's visitation."

What a shock! From a shouting, celebrating crowd to the sound of Jesus weeping! From
the feeling that we were finally about to win, to a prediction of massive military defeat!
From joyful laughter to tears!

We have just walked together one scene of this drama. We imagined ourselves walking down the dusty road with Jesus on a donkey...excitement building, the Pharisees warning us to be quiet. This brings us to another scene. The Parade that is processing from the other side town.

This is the weekend of Passover. The celebration of freedom from a long time ago for the Jewish people. Let's think about this. They are celebrating freedom in the past.... in a place where they are no longer free. They live under the rule of the Romans.

The Roman rulers don't let people forget who is in power.

- Herod rides into the city in full procession from his headquarters in Caesarea Philippi. He enters, not on a young donkey, but on a mighty warhorse. He is not surrounded by a ragtag crowd waving palm branches.
- He's surrounded by chariots, with uniformed soldiers.
- With their swords and spears and bows held high.
- His military procession is a show of force intended to inspire fear and compliance, not hope and joy.

Palm Sunday...2 parades... Jesus from the East on a donkey...Herod from the West on a warhorse surrounded by armed soldiers.

- This is not a May Day parade or the Santa Clause parade
- This a moment in time when 2 ways of seeing the world... clash.

This scruffy, poor group of people following Jesus could be called misfits. When I say that word "misfit", a certain person may come to come mind for you. Someone who didn't easily "fit in" with school or a peer group or work group. Maybe that person was you...maybe we all feel that way at some time in our life.

I want us to think about this word "misfit" in a new way. The Jesus followers that walked down the dusty road through the olive trees to Jerusalem are misfits... in a good way. They did not "fit in" with the program of the time. The Roman Empire governed the people with violence and fear.

- Yes, Herod did build a new Temple and build up Jerusalem.
- However; it was a great cost to most of the population.
- It was with a system which was ruled by a small number of wealthy people and economic exploitation of the pheasants was the way the system worked.
- And they used the religious system to make it legitimate

Rome's practice was to appoint local collaborators from indigenous Jewish populations to rule on Rome's behalf. They were given somewhat of a free hand to rule their population...as long as they were loyal to Rome and maintained order. This put them in a delicate balancing act. They needed to keep Rome happy but not so much so to anger their Jewish population.

Jesus enters the temple. He gets angry and flips the tables...money falling everywhere.

- He is not just flipping the tables of the commerce of the day...he is flipping the tables of a corrupt system.

- Poor people were required to pay for overpriced animals/birds for sacrifice at the temple.

- At the time with the system in place... this was their only way to salvation...or so they were told.

- Systemic corruption – paying money, keeping people poor, temple taxes, and sacrifice as the only way to God.... And all funding the Roman Rulers.

That's just the way it was...

Yes, Jesus and his followers refuse to fit into this system. They are "misfits."

- It starts with John the Baptist – he proclaims forgiveness – while apart from the temple.

- Jesus goes on to proclaim forgiveness and grace outside the temple. This act was radical...because it challenges the whole temple system and the powers that be at the time.

They were misfits for sure.

Rather than requiring people to pay for salvation at the temple...Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke)

Or another way of saying it, "Heaven is already here." (Matthew)

Wow...the kin dom of God is here now...heaven on earth...here now...

I watch the news and wonder...is this true?...I see a lot of suffering...and wonder how can this be?

And yet...this is what it means to follow this way of Jesus...

- To live as if the kingdom of God is here...

- To live as if heaven on Earth is now...

- To live as if...and to be co-creators with God, helping it happen...to help expand heaven on earth...with each interaction we have.

- To show God's love for all people through our actions everyday

As followers of Jesus down the mountain of Olive trees on a dusty morning...we have our 2 feet in 2 worlds.

- One foot...we are not naive...we know of the suffering of the world...and even the suffering in our own lives

- One foot...we know... the grace and love and healing of the surprising Spirit, to be with us...to be within our very breath of life, to be in our soul.

- To know of these 2 worlds...is to be, a bit of “misfit”...we straddle 2 worlds...we know the tension of this...
- And we know the promise of heaven on earth...
- Which leads us to our call to be a part of it...creating God’s Shalom each in our own small way...

But we don’t do this alone.

It takes support to be in the smaller less powerful parade...

Misfits like us need help.

Sometimes it’s hard to remember God is within us...heaven on earth now.

We need 3 things to help our journey:

1. We need a guide or a mentor. Someone who can listen without judgment and may see things we can’t see for ourselves.
2. We need a band of traveling companions. Other people committed to finding their own path of aliveness. Their own way to help with “heaven here on earth.” People who will celebrate our triumphs and share our tragedies.
3. We need a “community of faith.” But not just any community of faith. It needs to be one that is willing to be a misfit. To not fit into systems, including religious systems, without questioning what it means.

Misfit “communities of faith” are:

- Willing to be part of an evolving faith that dialogues with other faith traditions not to fight with them...but to work with them...towards heaven on earth

Misfit “communities of faith” are:

- Willing to move past prejudices against sexual orientation and gender identities that, in the past, have been made legitimate by the church

Misfit “communities of faith” (Churches)

- Embrace the idea that science and faith can serve as allies...and that God values our minds as well as our hearts.

Misfit “communities of faith” are:

- Willing to let go of old hierarchies that privilege religious leaders over lay people

These are some of the things make up a “misfit” community of faith. Mentors, traveling companions, and misfit communities of faith.

Here is some good news.

Maybe you don’t feel or experience or know “the kingdom of God within your own soul” or “heaven on earth” that I have been talking about...and that’s ok...

Because this line from Luke, “the kingdom of God is within you”, can also be translated to, “the kingdom of God is already among you.”

- Or in the midst of you

Ah...whew...that means even when I don't know the God / Spirit within me...I can be around others...and the Spirit will be in them...or maybe the Spirit of life will be between us...present in the words that we exchange between us...present in the actions that are taken...that connect us to each other. The kingdom of God is among us...in our midst...we are not alone...mmm...I'm thankful for this! Amen...

Take a moment now for our own reflection.

I invite to write down on a thank you note or piece of paper someone who has been part of your “misfit” community.

- Someone who has been with you at times in the dark woods of your life
- Someone who has been the spirit of life...in your midst
- If you'd like, send a card or phone and let the person know they have been a help to you

Blessing

Go into the week
thankful for others who have been a comfort to you.
Go into the week
with the love of God
the teachings of Jesus
and the power of the Holy Spirit.
Go in peace
Amen.