

Hosanna in the Highest Heaven!
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
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13:10

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Pilgrim Church UCC Homily Outline, Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11) April 9, 2017

Setting the Scene

-In Jerusalem one can travel the Pilgrim Walk—beginning on the top of the Mount of Olives at the Church of Bethphage. The memory of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem has been kept alive in this Franciscan Church (where the annual Palm Sunday walk begins, tradition begun during Crusader times.)

-On display in the church is a large rock that the Crusaders believed was the mounting-block Jesus used to ride atop the donkey. Paintings on the sides of the rock depict the disciples collecting the donkey and colt, people holding palm branches, and the Raising of Lazarus at Bethany.

-To walk the Pilgrim Walk you begin at Bethphage and keep walking down the Mount, stop at various churches along the way (Pater Noster, Dominus Fleuit, Church of All Nations (Gethsemane.)) You then walk steep steps up to the Temple Mount. This is the path Jesus often walked to get from Bethany to the Temple.

-On this day, Jesus’ walk would have been quite dramatic due to the geography of the land alone.

How People Respond to Jesus in his Final Days

-A unified angry mob present throughout Holy Week probably not historically accurate.

-Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan argue in *The Last Week* that the Temple authorities didn’t represent the Jewish people as a whole as they were the local collaborators with the Romans.[1] It’s why Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and tried before the religious authorities at night. Judas has to look for an opportune time to betray Jesus, away from the sympathetic/supportive crowds.

-Those who arrest him are the small military police force of the religious authorities, not these hopeful people we hear earnestly shouting their hosannas (“save us”) and laying their branches and cloaks at Jesus’ feet!

-The people who shouted crucify on Friday were likely a small crowd gathered by the chief priests to decide the fate of Jesus and Barabbas, both defied imperial authority. Jesus used symbolic actions and nonviolence.

-Remember Jesus clears out the Temple after he enters Jerusalem as part of the prophetic tradition, and this symbolic action seals his fate in the Synoptic Gospels.[2]

-One of the worst parts of Holy Week is the desertion of Jesus’ own disciples. It all begins on such a joyful note to go get a donkey and then shouts of “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” and yet there’s an ominous undertone. Matthew tells us that the whole city is in turmoil and people are asking, “Who is this?”[3]

-Bottom line, we see many responses and reactions to Jesus during Holy Week. The arrest and the first trial against Jesus happened at night because the crowds of your regular Jewish men, women, and children present for Passover would have probably rather heard from the humble teacher from Galilee than some religious official who worked with the Romans to oppress them in the first place!

-The disciples desert and flee, but many of the women followers stay.

What about Us?

-Holy Week has a varied and complicated cast of characters. The question becomes how will we respond?

-Power and authority being challenged here by someone who didn't have institutional power. How do we treat those who speak truth to power in our own time?

-When we hear these stories, are there characters we identify with—if so, why and what does that say about where we are in our own lives?

-“Church” after all isn't just what we experience on Sunday mornings. What we do here should be with us during the week—we're seeking to be weekday Christians not just Sunday morning Christians. Holy Week (the holiest week we've got) is an invitation into the heart of the Christian faith. Come and see!

[1] Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*, 128.

[2] Borg and Crossan, *The Last Week*, 144.

[3] Matthew 21:11, NRSV.