

Palm Sunday Reflection
Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
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April 10, 2022

Text: Luke 19:28-40

Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, '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. ³¹If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it." ' ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' ³⁴They said, 'The Lord needs it.' ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As 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, ³⁸saying, 'Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!'

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' ⁴⁰He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Reflection

Jesus comes into town, through a gate on the east side of Jerusalem,
on a humble colt -

welcomed by the people's cries - Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us!

And the crowds -

his friends, his followers, the curious and the ones who have heard of this great teacher, and
even some of the most devout religious leaders -

and the poor, the hungry, those in need of healing, and ones who live in occupied territory -
the crowds make a path for him by laying down cloaks and rags and whatever they had -
and they reach up to the trees around them and wave branches,

And suddenly there is a parade.

Hosanna! Here is the one who will save us! Hosanna! Save us!

And Jesus comes into town through a gate on the east side of Jerusalem.

Just then Pontius Pilate, Roman ruler, comes into town from the opposite side, to keep the
people in line during their festival celebrating great and ancient liberation from oppression.

Rome had power over the people. If they'd carried a banner, it would have said: We are the strongest and the greatest. Only we can save you. You are a conquered people, and that's the way it's supposed to be.

Jesus comes into town, the sovereign of peace, the child of God. He comes into Jerusalem, city of peace where there is no peace, because for so long his heart has been drawn to this place.

He comes from the east, on a humble farm animal, with no horses or swords, no drums, no soldiers, no prestige, no intimidation, no might. No symbols of power over. Just people, peasants, pilgrims, disciples, calling out, Hosanna, Hosanna. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Save us, here is the one who will save us, Hosanna!

Jesus' message of peace and justice, Jesus' message of compassion and the realm of God come near, has led him to this place and this time.

And this is the king we meet on this Palm Sunday, not a king like anyone expected - a humble servant leader among the people, a savior who will speak for love and justice no matter what happens to him, one who will speak truth to the powers that be no matter what.

Jesus is at the beginning of a Holy Week, and a spiral of intensity that builds and builds.

Jesus does not just claim power for the powerless, he redefines power. As he has always, this week, Jesus will call people away from the power structures that human beings so consistently cling to, calling us toward the power of love.

But this week the powers that be will try to stop Jesus.

And they almost will.

On Friday the worst and most terrible thing will happen.

You see I am using the present and future tense for this week, because it is Holy Week and we are invited into the story, as we are every year.

We are invited to walk a journey with Jesus, witnessing his strength and courage. We are invited to watch Jesus do such hard things - and to do them out of love for his friends, his followers, his community, all people - and even us.

There are moments in this week when Jesus' friends and followers are incredibly important to him.

For some of them, he washes their feet in an act of humble service. He calls them friends. One of his followers comes to Jesus and anoints Jesus with oil. Some of them pray with Jesus and for Jesus, and some of them stand nearby and keep watch.

Not all of them are able. We know from the story that some will walk away from him, deny him, betray him.

This Holy Week, this terrible and beautiful, intense and sad week, let's stay close by. Let's watch and witness and walk with Jesus. Stay with him. Learn from him. Pray with him and for him.

At the beginning of Lent we read a passage from Matthew 25 in which Jesus tells his friends that whatever they do to take care of people, whatever acts of love and mercy and compassion, they do to Jesus. So Sarah has activity for us for this week, this Holy Week to serve one another in a profound way, even as we follow Jesus through this week.