

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Palm Sunday

April 13, 2014

Scriptures Readings:

Luke 19:28-40

Luke 22:1-23

Into Jerusalem

There is a congregation in a historic, challenged urban environment in downtown Washington, D.C. that on Palm Sunday Marches with palms not just in the sanctuary but around the neighbourhood. After marching through the streets they return to the sanctuary for the reading the Passion. David Lose recalls joining them one year. He reports “My initial response to participating in this march around the community was one of excitement. Having just heard the story of Jesus’ entry into the capitol city of Israel accompanied by his faithful disciples and hopeful crowds, I felt a rush of exuberance to be doing the same, lauding Jesus’ name and witnessing to our hope of salvation in him...

At the same time, however, I also felt a bit trivial. It’s a vibrant congregation with two services, but it’s not a large congregation. At the early service in particular our group of marchers was fairly small. The people we passed greatly outnumbered us, and this was fairly early on a Sunday morning! I realize that’s the point was bearing witness to our Lord but at times I also felt a bit discouraged, even a tad foolish, as our march seemed to make little to no impression. Most folks glanced our way for a moment and then returned their attention to the conversation or cup of coffee they had been enjoying. While a few folks smiled their encouragement, most of those who watched our progress for any length of time looked a tad puzzled, perhaps wondering what we were doing. No one, however, joined our pilgrimage or shouted out “Hosanna.””¹

Personally, every Palm Sunday I find myself wondering what it would have been like to be there on that day, which is why I have enjoyed the wonderings of the various character groups this morning. I wonder if this march was hugely significant for everyone present or if there were those gathered on the side-lines who didn’t have a clue. I always wonder what it would have been like for the disciples and even more so for Jesus. In Matthew’s account of the story some of the crowd is witnessing to their faith in this prophet Jesus while others are baffled by the procession, wondering who is this “Hosanna” ?

And even today we ask that same question. “Who is this one hailed by peasants, lepers, cripples, prostitutes and day labourers as messiah? Who *is this*...peasant, *who* rides into the city like a king? Who is this whose devoted followers soon turn on him, as the disciples disperse, his friend

¹ workingpreacher.org

denies, and the crowds accuse? Who is this who is tried by both religious and political elite and found, ...threatening, *as* an enemy to the establishment?"

As we continue our story we find ourselves asking "Who is this who is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and hauled to the execution grounds? Who is this who is hung on a cross abandoned and forsaken? Who is this?"

Those looking on for the first time, and fringe followers must have begun to wonder why so many were starting to follow Jesus, and why the authorities had any concern of him. He rides on a donkey, he barely speaks. He is not a vision of power, a king with authority. He looks weak and vulnerable. He is full of mercy and love not authority. How will he change the world? How will he right the wrongs.

And yet just as is true today Jesus lived the only way of true transformation. As Martin Luther King Jr., once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

It must have been a lonely ride for Jesus, to be surrounded by screaming fans but burdened by the knowledge of how brief their acclaim will be. "This is the point of no return for Jesus. By entering Jerusalem on a colt with the crowds laying down their cloaks before him and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" he has triggered one prophetic tripwire too many. The Roman rulers and the Jewish religious authorities can no longer pretend that he is insignificant, that he is a fad, that he is not dangerous."²

"The crowds don't know what's coming. The disciples have been given hints and even outright declarations from Jesus that the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners and killed, but like all of us who know our loved ones will die someday, we shy away from actually imagining what it will be like or admitting that it could happen at any moment. To the disciples and the crowds, this is a moment of incredible potential and excitement. They have seen the miracles Jesus is capable of, who knows what that power might do if they could convince him to turn it against Rome? And his making such a bold entry into the heart of the Romans' stolen power surely bodes well for that project."³

And our immersion in these scriptures today in worship, moving from the palm and then through the week processing to the Passion, deliberately provokes a crisis within ourselves. "The crowd abruptly transitions in less than a week from adulation and joyful allegiance to Jesus to rage-filled demands for him to be crucified. The disciples move from proudly marching at his side through the streets of Jerusalem to slinking away in stomach-clenching fear, insisting they don't know who he is. While taking our place among the crowds on Good Friday shouting for Jesus to

² Walk through Holy Week with Jesus BY THE REV. WHITNEY RICE

³ IBID

be crucified feels awkward and painful, the disciples' experience of simply not affirming that we know him, of finding that our fear prevents us from being present with another's pain, feels all too familiar.

Holy Week, which begins today, is our opportunity to immerse ourselves in this move from the false joy of Palm Sunday, a joy that is centred around expectations of power and reward, through the pain of finding that our faith is often so weak when Jesus needs us the most, finally to the deep and profound joy of the day of Resurrection, the day of forgiveness and new life. We have the opportunity to walk with Jesus in real time as the hourglass runs out, as he struggles with the knowledge that he has less than a week to live.

Who is this?

This one journeying on a donkey on this day is the one we look to, to see a demonstration of God's love, hope, mercy and justice. "This is Jesus, the paradigm of God's action in the world, whose story comes to a climax this week in order that our story might begin anew and afresh with the hope and promise of a good ending."⁴

This is Jesus. May we see him. May we come to know the Holy as we journey with him in this Holy week.

⁴ workingpreacher.org