

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Lent VI - Palm Sunday
Rising From the Ashes

March 19, 2015

Scripture Readings:
Mark 11: 1-11

Kairos Moment From the Ashes

Bruce Pewer wrote:

This donkey did not know; but did he comprehend
who the rider was who nudged him down the road
among the shouting mob waving palm branches
through the city gates with praise that was too brief?

This donkey did not know; but did he comprehend
these gentle hands that guided him on a journey
which pilgrims would recall for thousands of years
with gratitude and praise mixed with adoring grief?

This donkey did not know; but did he comprehend
that angels and archangels held their breath with awe
as the source of galaxies rode on in humble majesty
to a holy mystery that beggars all belief?¹

Ó B D Prewer 2002

This palm Sunday day is a familiar day for most of us. We have heard this story before, we wave the palms once and year and you might even be getting used to this minister who wants them left as a reminder of the celebration and the journey we take into holy week.

We still call out for peace in Jerusalem, we still long for them to know holy love and grace and so I invite you to imagine what this palm parade looks like today. I imagine it today it would take just as much courage to walk into the city - or ride in on a donkey claiming God's kingdom come, claiming a new way. If we were to have read this text from John it would have said of Jesus "He came unto his own people, but his own did not welcome him" John 1:11

Jesus' journey began with a blessing and then he headed straight into the wilderness. He faced great temptation and he persevered because he knew his purpose, he fully aligned himself with the holy. We have journeyed with Jesus through Lent, we have walked the road to the culmination of today. This is the moment, the climax of the journey.

¹ *Ó B D Prewer 2002*

“Jerusalem is the place where political, religious, and military power are centred. And it’s where Jesus needs to show up. Oh, he knows the risk; in fact, he’s been talking about the danger all along the way. It must have been tempting to back away; to not give offense; to not rock the boat. But that wasn’t his style.

Because the Jesus way isn’t just about individual transformation, healing, acceptance, and forgiveness. Oh it is that, and each one of us is challenged and loved into new ways of living and being. But it’s also about the city; the way we live together, how we organize our social structures. It’s about the realm of God, about money, government, policy, peace, and community. In going to Jerusalem, Jesus is choosing to make a political statement, rendering unto God what is God’s. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem he is acting as a prophet, proclaiming the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent; and believe the good news,” not just at the Jordan River, not just “up north,” but in the very heart of the nation.”²

It is in Jerusalem that the decision of and for life is made. Jesus longed to show a new way. That was his whole purpose in face it still is. And as Bruce Prewer writes “Jerusalem, the holy city, missed its biggest opportunity. That is one ingredient in the sad irony of Palm Sunday. It was the rejection of a remarkable opening. Jesus, the noblest of all the sons of Israel, came to the city of a billion Hebrew prayers, but most of its inhabitants did not welcome him.

The crowd that shouted “Hosanna!” contained mainly pilgrims from Galilee, arriving for the Festival of Passover. Their enthusiasm may have stirred some of the citizens of Jerusalem to come out and watch; maybe a few joined the shouts of praise. But the majority in the Holy City missed the opportunity to welcome the Messiah for whom their people had prayed for hundreds of years. The priests were not out there waving palm branches. The city councillors were not shouting “Hosanna”. The lawyers and learned rabbis were not opening their minds and hearts to this most wonderful opportunity that had ever come their way. The Messiah was there but they recognized him not. The true Son of God was in their streets but they welcomed him not. They lost their big chance.”³

It is not hard to imagine that the majority of people were too set in their ways, too distracted and absorbed in the affairs of life and the religious duties of the day that they completely missed the Son of God in the Holy City. He came not his own, but they did not welcome him.

In the Greek this would be known as a Kairos moment or event. A time when God is doing something and we can choose to participate or not. “It is a critical time, when God is active in a special way and presents us with a window of opportunity. (In Luke’s account of Palm Sunday,

² <http://www.garypaterson.ca/2015/03/23/longing-for-home-lenten-study-palm-sunday/>

³ SERMON 1: OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocB/BPALM.htm>

he actually uses the word kairos to describe the opportunity which the Holy City was offered, yet did not take.)

Kairos time demands a decision from us. Deferring the decision is the same result as rejection, because we miss out on the unique moment. This opportunity may never again present itself to us.”⁴

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is a kairos moment few took the opportunity to welcome. To be honest we tend to romanticize this moment. As Gary Paterson writes “Yes, some disciples spread branches and cloaks around, but scholars suggest that it was, actually, a small demo; not a big deal. If Jesus had wanted to make a grand statement he could have jumped off the top of the temple, turned the stones into bread; called on legions of angels. But he didn’t; and he doesn’t want his followers to do so either.

Which says something about the way Jesus treats power. Jesus – Pilate; Jesus – Herod; Jesus – Caiaphas. Vulnerability; humility; suffering; sacrifice; love. The servant way.”⁵

So the question for us on this palm Sunday is “Where are you in the parade?” Are you right there walking alongside Jesus, laying your cloak on the ground, waving your palm branch or even holding the donkey? Or are you a little further back observing the demonstration, waving half heartedly, considering the others to be a bit foolish? Perhaps you are observing, wondering what this is really all about? Or perhaps you are at home preparing a feast for the passover celebrations? Maybe you are watching the parade, shaking your head at this group of rabble rousers, thinking, just calm down and be quiet or you are going to mess up our whole system, and it works just fine for me the way it is. Perhaps you are offended because you really don’t think religion has any business messing with politics. Or you simply have too much on your plate and you find yourself needing to work through the holy week to get things in order for the next important step in life.

Where is God taking you on the journey this holy week? Gary Paterson asks us “where is the place we need to show up? Where are we challenged to speak truth to power? To raise issues? To take a risk? To demand change?”⁶ Are we missing God’s call in the journey because we are refusing it, or perhaps simply not paying attention? So often we miss the opportunity, we miss God’s call on our lives because “We become caught up in petty joys, worries or plans. We are blinded by second-rate wants and wishes. We cling to tiddly-wink pleasures. We hang on to positions of petty status that are no more important than a child’s game of hop-scotch. We adhere to the opinions of a peer group, some of whose values we may secretly despise. With such trivia we miss God’s times of wonderful opportunity. So when God in Christ arrives in our street with

⁴ IBID

⁵ paterson

⁶ Paterson

majestic purposes more lofty than mountain peaks, we turn our backs and scuttle away to our little, familiar ant hills. *He came unto his own people, but his own did not welcome him*⁷

Paterson wrote: I think of Chief Theresa Spence pitching her tent in the heart of Ottawa, and embarking on a fast in order to draw attention to the plight of Aboriginal people in Attawapiskat. I think of people showing up in front of downtown stores to protest the selling of products made by Israeli companies located in Palestinian West Bank. I think of the Occupy Wall Street movement and its spread throughout Canadian cities, asking questions about how wealth gets shared in our society. Or the protest march through New York last fall, when the UN Summit on the Environment was happening.

It could be people reaching out to Muslim neighbours in bad times; or United Church Women heading off to Edmonton, standing up for kids living in poverty; or protestors getting arrested for confronting Kinder Morgan pipeline exploration on Burnaby mountain. Or... well, you finish the sentence.” Where is it that you are being drawn in this holy journey. Each of us has a call from God’s heart. Yours will look different from mine. But God is here and now, and we are called to join Jesus on this journey.

Prewer wrote: “A few years ago I tried to express this sense of lost opportunity in a modern setting of Palm Sunday. Five people dealing with the arrival of Jesus into their community: a farmer in town buying a new car, a young woman busy in an office, a real estate agent, a bored wealthy woman at home, and a university professor.

THE ARRIVAL

On the day when Jesus the prophet arrived in our town,
Joe Farmer was very busy choosing a new car.

He heard the distant cheering: “Hosanna! Blessed is he
who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Mentally he made a note and promised himself
hear the prophet; some day, not now.

Joe was far too occupied with trade-in price fuel consumption,
and the virtues of the ST or the LJ model,
and whether either car was better than his neighbour’s.

At coffee break 22 year old Esther Romantic
also heard the uproar coming from High Street.

She felt an impulse to go and join the crowd
with those who welcomed the prophet,
for stories about him had strangely
shaken and encouraged her.

But Esther’s wedding day was only seven weeks off
and she still had thinking to do

⁷ Prewer

about the flowers, shade of eye shadow,
or whether on the tables she wanted with every place card
a wishbone.

For Jim Smiley the real estate agent
it was infuriating:
Time was money!
Here he was stuck in a traffic jam in the middle of town,
thanks to these idiots with grins, slogans and palm branches,
supporting this new fool
Jesus who had said some rotten things about real estate.
Jim was due in four minutes at Toorak Place
to meet with a wealthy client.
Jim yelled at a policeman patrolling the edge of the procession:
“How about some law and order!”

Some did not even hear the cheering nor cared.
Beth Goldsmith with fingers covered with rings
was watching “Days of our lives”
when the prophet walked within one block
of her residence.
They interrupted the programme for an eyewitness report
on the progress of the street demo.
Beth took the opportunity to fetch another pot of coffee and two aspirin.

Professor Nicodemus was lecturing at the University.
He noted the small number who had turned up today,
and even they were restless.
He asked the reason.
They gave him the news that the prophet Jesus was leading a demo
to the Central Mall.
On an impulse Nicodemus dismissed the surprised students
and hurried off down High Street where, somewhat embarrassed,
he joined the crowd and found himself shouting “Hosanna!”
At the sound of his own voice, the Prof felt his own soul—
as if a birth was about to take place—leap for joy within!
And it seemed as if all things were becoming new.

Opportunity knocks. Sometimes.

In the last six weeks we have seen the ways in which we can participate in helping that which is wrong, or dying, or grieving or needing light rise from the ashes. On this palm Sunday we have one more opportunity in this holy season to rise up, to journey with Jesus in a desire to bring

God's kingdom of love and grace to fruition in our world. When we fail to notice God with us, or when we let that which we know does not spring from the holy heart continue to happen we find on the sidelines of the Palm Sunday parade. When we let injustice happen and hope someone else will stand up for what is right and simply let it go on, we allow Good Friday to happen all over again.

We journey with many who do not see the kairos moment as Jesus enters Jerusalem.