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Squamish United Church

March 28, 2010

Readings - Palm Sunday

**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

**Luke 19:28-40**

## **Courage to Live**

Really this Sunday should be called 'journey' Sunday.

There is no easter lesson today, this is not the week for that. This is the day where we begin an uncomfortable journey. A journey that takes us off the road of contentment and causes us to come face to face with some hard truths.

I wonder what it would have been like to be on that road that day.

I imagine the road would have looked a little like it did when the torch was going directly through downtown vancouver. Crowds of people gathered for an experience, coming together to see this one pass through.

See, Jerusalem had a population of about 50,000 at this time and this had at least tripled in size with the influx of pilgrims celebrating the Passover. In the crowded streets many people shouted hurrahs but there was a nervousness in the air knowing protesters were about. And although those protesters would have popped up from time to time the welcome procession overwhelmed the day.

I wonder what that day was like for Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a Donkey; cloaks being thrown at his feet; palms being waved "Glory, honour and praise" being shouted.

Hosanna - Save us the people cried.

I wonder what it felt like in that glory moment knowing the opposition was lurking around the corner.

I wonder what thoughts were racing through his head. Was he nervous, scared, unsure?

We don't know - but what we do know is that he had the courage to live. His thoughts and fears are not as important in this scene as what he did.

Whether or not Jesus knew he was going to be crucified, he knew that going into Jerusalem was dangerous. He knew that the political and religious leaders were threatened by him.

History tells us that in this time bankers were proud of their increasing profits while they closed down banks in the countryside. Jesus' ministry threatened their lifestyle and business. Religious leaders, moneylenders, physicians and politicians would have wanted his justice telling to be stopped. Who did he think he was, going around telling people about God, and healing people without years of training? Not only that he walked around claiming money was the root of all evil. And to top it all off people were starting to listen, they were making parades for this man who is taking the power that is rightly theirs.

But the Hosanna's rang for Jairus and his daughter had shared their story, the healed lepers had danced through the streets that they had previously been outcast from.

Glory rang through the crowds in a way you couldn't believe because his healing touch had cured people diseased and outcast for years. Children had been welcomed, lives had been transformed by the teachings of this prophet. Jesus had saved them from their isolation, oppression, exile and despair.

Jesus was a protestor for love. He spoke against the powerful to hold up the outcast.

This is not a story of a meek and mild man riding into Jerusalem on an unworthy version of horse. This is a man who has the courage to live. This is a man who is willing to come face to face with the injustice and oppression of the world no matter what the cost.

“Jesus didn't trot into Jerusalem on the back of a humble donkey naively. he knew he was riding into trouble. his very presence was considered highly dangerous to the people in power because he was filled with a power this world can never fully understand. Jesus was filled with the power of uncompromising love. And genuine love sometimes puts a finger in your face and says, “Your Wrong.” Most people don't like that. It makes them feel very uncomfortable. The priests and politicians really didn't like it when Jesus started messing with their neat, economically beneficial system. So while branches were waving and people smiled at him as he rode toward the gates of Jerusalem where Roman soldiers stood on guard, he knew he was stepping into the line of fire. It took courage.”<sup>1</sup>

Courage is something that I actually believe God calls us to. God calls us to believe in ourselves and others more than we do. God calls us to see ourselves and others through holy promising eyes. Seeing Jesus live with this kind of courage could help us see new possibilities. This piece of our story joins us on the journey as we admit how often we are forced to face courage each day.

I think that is why so many of us struggle with Holy week. We don't like to acknowledge the darkness, despair, cruelty, struggles and fears of life.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dan Cahmbers, ST. David's United Church April 9, 2006 “The Courage to Live”

Every year I hear people say I don't go to Good Friday services because they are so solemn. And yet I wonder how can we get to the Easter story without the journey? When we do that we are more likely to fall into the kind of faith that expects life to be perfect just because I've become a Christian or I've followed God. We make God the presence only available in the mountain-top experiences.

Gomes writes "God's love does not do away with *suffering* God's love is the thing that makes it possible to bear it, to see it, to share in it, to understand it, and to pass through it."<sup>2</sup> Coming to terms with the suffering of Christ helped me appreciate the courage and love he had. It helped me see how God faces injustice and pain head on with courage.

Often we think of courageous people as soldiers going off to war, or firefighters entering a burning building to save a stranded child. Courageous people might be peacemakers standing in the line of fire in a war zone or police heading into a gang fight. And yet courage is found in so many more people and places.

Courage is found when someone stands up to a boss who is abusing authority or when one removes themselves from an unhealthy relationship so that they can live more fully. Courage is found in a gay person who comes out to his family, friends and community knowing that he might not get a loving response. Courage is found when one sits day after day with a loved one who is dying. Courage is found in filmmakers who dare to report the injustices in our world. Courage is found in a person who is willing to look at their life and say I can do better than this and then try.

Miller writes "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying I will try again tomorrow."

Palm/Passion Sunday is one of the most realistic days of the year. It is the day when we see even Jesus face a harsher version of the confusion and disorientation we face in many of our lives. Jesus faced head on those people and places that sought to oppress him and others. And although I am not convinced I will ever have that kind of courage I like many of you do face challenges that take courage often.

This journey will not always be easy. You may be the person who is called upon to fix mountains of struggles in the work place, or to be along side friends in the midst of a failing marriage. You may be called upon to be alongside a terminally ill family member or friend, or a child who is struggling with mental illness or addictions. At times you will feel like you are

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<sup>2</sup> sermon nuggets textweek.com

walking straight into someone else's dark hole. And at times it would be easier not to care. I wonder how Jesus felt?

The journey will not always be easy. At times you may be the person in the midst of the workplace hassle or failing marriage, or terminal illness or addiction. At times it may be you who is crying Hosanna. Jesus save me.

And if you are the psalmist cries out to you “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” And perhaps the courageous thing for you to do right now is show up in this place and sit in a pew and hope you get a glimpse of the kingdom of God through all that surrounds you.

The journey will not always be easy - we might even be called to get up on a donkey and ride with Jesus into Jerusalem and face the injustice of our world. We may be called to face the world with courage and love rather than fear and oppression.

The reality is that often it takes courage just to live. It takes courage to be authentically who you are when others around you say that’s not who they want you to be. It takes courage to challenge yourself to live fully present.

Jesus took his courageous life into Jerusalem because he felt compelled to go to the holy city and speak on behalf of God against injustice. Dan Chambers wrote “Jesus went to overturn the tables of money changers and temple sacrifice that made a business of God. Jesus went to protest the rigid religious rules that oppressed women and the poor. Jesus went to Jerusalem to challenge the power of Rome. It took immense courage to put his body on the line and risk his life. The Romans were very good at murder, rat infested prisons, torture. If you got in their way, they were not nice. Jesus challenged the lordship of Caesar. His religion mixed heavily with politics.

The task of being human challenges us to live life fully, keeping fear in check with at least an adequate dose of courage. As followers of Christ, we have the added bonus of a deep reservoir of courage from which to tap. Jesus is not only an example of courage to inspire us. The presence of Christ is a source of courage. It’s the courage that gave the disciples the strength to speak about Christ in the public market, not long after they saw how Jesus himself had been brutalized and knowing full well that they might suffer a similar death.”<sup>3</sup>

It’s the courage of Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa. It’s a palm Sunday courage that brings us out of our comfort zones and asks us to fight for social housing, for the environment, for injustice against women and children. It’s a palm Sunday courage that asks us to run for a cure, or speak out for the poor. The courage of Jesus doesn’t have us riding into

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers

town in a limo for the parade it has us humble and aware and moving forward step by step. This palm Sunday kind of courage has us going into the marketplaces to see where the God presence is needed. It may not change the world in a day but it will cause us to go to sleep saying I'll try again tomorrow.

We as Christians may not look a whole lot different from anyone else but we have a reservoir of courage found in our source of life and faith. Others may not see it but ask anyone in this room, the majority of us are here because we have felt it. We may not have a vast warehouse of big, bold courageous acts to point to. But all of us have a vast reservoir of courage, a power given to us that the world may not even see. Our source of life and love gives us the strength to journey into the Jerusalem's of our lives with a courage to live.

May we as people of faith live in courage this day.

Amen.