

Palm Sunday - April 9, 2017
Scripture Readings and Reflections
Rev. Sally May

Call to Worship while distributing Palms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; the steadfast love of God endures forever!

²Let Israel say, "God's steadfast love endures forever."

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God, and has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever.

Matthew 21: 1-11 (Modern English Version - MEV)

When they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go over into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them.' And he will send them immediately." All this was done to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying:

*Tell the daughter of Zion,
‘Look, your King is coming to you,
humble, and sitting on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’*

The disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their garments on them, and He sat on them. A very large crowd spread their garments on the road. Others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went before Him and that followed Him cried out:

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’
Hosanna in the highest!”*

When He entered Jerusalem, the entire city was moved, saying, “Who is He?” The crowds said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Word of God for All Ages Synopsis: Palm Sunday alone is not enough. To fully understand and appreciate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem we must also enter into Holy Week. All of life is not a parade. We begin this sacred time with a parade on Palm Sunday and we celebrate again on Easter Sunday. In between there is a lot of denial, betrayal, darkness, and, yes, death: Death on a cross. Like our lives, some days are great and other days are really awful. Let us begin our entry into Holy Week.

Matthew 21: 12-17 (The Message - MSG) *Jesus went straight to the Temple and threw out everyone who had set up shop, buying and selling. He kicked over the tables of loan sharks and the stalls of dove merchants. He quoted this text: My house was designated a house of prayer; You have made it a hangout for thieves. Now there was room for the blind and crippled to get in. They came to Jesus and he healed them. When the religious leaders saw the outrageous things he was doing, and heard all the children running and shouting through the Temple, “Hosanna to David’s Son!” they were up in arms and took him to task. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” Jesus said, “Yes, I hear them. And haven’t you read in God’s Word, ‘From the mouths of children and babies I’ll furnish a place of praise’?” Fed up, Jesus turned on his heel and left the city for Bethany, where he spent the night.*

Reflection Have you ever been so upset, so angry, so fed up that you would like to overthrow a few tables? I get why Jesus felt that way, responded that way. As a Jewish man, he saw his people, his religion, his God being exploited. What I had not previously noticed in this passage was the role of the children in the Temple. In the midst of Jesus’ healing the “blind and the

crippled” – the oppressed, the marginalized, the ‘other,’ “all the children are running and shouting through the Temple” with words honoring Jesus as Lord: “Hosanna to David’s Son!” I can only imagine how the adults around them reacted! In the midst of dysfunction, corruption, and demagoguery, the children break through all of that and offer praise and, frankly, hope. What Jesus offers encourages and supports what the children seemingly intuitively believe, and both Jesus and the children freak out the religious leaders. It reminds me of an experience someone shared with me this past Friday evening at Faithful Friday. There were several prayer stations set up. One was two mirrors on an easel, one at a child’s height and the other at the height of an adult, and an opportunity to receiving and offering anointing. The instructions were “Gaze into a mirror. Examine the reflection that stares back at you. Meditate on God’s abundant love for you. Are you able to give thanks to God for the amazing creation that is you? As you consider your reflection, perhaps use this centering prayer, praying it over and over, meditating upon and sinking deeply into the meaning of the words: Thank you God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. As is comfortable for you, accept an invitation to be anointed, embracing the gift of life and the gift of you as a beloved creation and child of God.” With the anointing the words were shared “You are a beloved child of God, sealed in Divine Love, called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, forever nurtured by the Holy Spirit.” The adult who shared with me noted with emotion how the children simply got it. Of course, I am beloved, of course I am beautiful – bodies loose, smiles on faces ~ while adults hesitated, questioned..... As we share in our prayer of confession let us turn over the tables that blind us and bind us from recognizing our beauty, our royalty as children of God and the beauty, royalty, and status of all the beloved children of God.

Prayer of Confession

Matthew 26:1-5 (New Living Translation - NLT)

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “As you know, Passover begins in two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” At that same time the leading priests and elders were meeting at the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, plotting how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the Passover celebration,” they agreed, “or the people may riot.”

Reflection In this text there is the word “but.” As I get older or wiser, not sure which, I am more suspicious of the word “but.” And I increasingly do not like secrets and misrepresentations. This brief text is full of all of these things. And guess what, Jesus knew what the plan was and he had shared it with his disciples – “two days into Passover and he will be betrayed and taken into custody.” As we learn on Maundy Thursday, the authorities come in the dark hours of the early morning away from the city and the crowds and quietly arrest Jesus

“And the people did not riot”....The authorities had figured it out. We cannot object to what we do not know about. In defense of the disciples who denied Jesus or ran away, sometimes what is true and real is so painful, so raw, so big, so overwhelming that it is not that we refuse to believe it, we simply cannot imagine such cruelty, such suffering inflicted *by* anyone, *on* anyone. Yet, as the story of Holy Week shares, such things *are* real, they *do* happen, and we are more honest when we do not offer “but,” rather when we offer ourselves open and honest, reflective and responsive to the gift of life, the love of God, and the hope offered in faith.

Hymn Ah Holy Jesus (sitting)

Prayers of the People

Matthew 26:6-13 (New American Standard Bible - NASB) *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, “Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. ¹² For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”*

Reflection I love this passage... It is a moment in time... A moment that fills space with scent, the scent of costly perfume; fills space with touch, touch of this woman anointing Jesus, and fills space with sound, the sound of Jesus’ words “you will always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.” Jesus is revealing the gift of his humanity as he acknowledges his impending death.

How many times have we made decisions rooted in monetary value, rather than worth to self care, or the care of others? I constantly struggle, and know others do too, with balancing what we ought to do with what we perceive we can financially afford to do.

The conversations and decisions individuals, towns and cities, states and nations, and yes, churches, of how we educate our children, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, welcome the stranger, care for our earth is grounded too often in not in how much we care but in how much it costs. As you know, churches are increasingly closing doors. This not because the community of faith no longer loves God, rather being church with a building became too expensive.

This brings me back to the story and the woman, and why she would do what she did, spend the money she spent. Maybe it wasn't a choice. I wonder that rather it was a deep need, a desire, a call, if you will, to anoint Jesus – To remind herself and those present, and perhaps even Jesus, that he was a beloved child of God. Her love and awe for Jesus was so great so as to take over what most of us perceive as practical, logical thinking and response –as well as immense courage rooted in faith. The money did *not* matter, because it was not *about* the money. Her spirited response to Jesus' presence was all about love, gratitude, trust and faith.

This woman had Jesus in the flesh so as to show her love and adoration. We do not. We do, though, have the Holy Spirit to lead us in faith to show ourselves and the world our love and adoration for Jesus Christ in recognizing the Living Christ in all the world around us. As we remember the fear, the suffering, the death of Jesus, in this Holy Week, we must also remember that out of death came new Life. Let us also remember as people of faith, as Church, the passion and extravagance by which we care for creation, we care for ourselves, we care for one another is a living reflection of *our* adoration, our love, our courage, and our discipleship to Jesus just as beautifully and powerfully and importantly as the passion and extravagance offered by this “any” woman.

Offering

Matthew 26:14-16 (Common English Bible - CEB) *Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I turn Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on he was looking for an opportunity to turn him in.*

Reflection What would you accept to betray a friend, a mentor, a teacher, your God?

As we leave the celebratory tone, the hope of Palm Sunday – a day of constructed salvation in the minds of the people and the beginning of the plot to kill Jesus; as we enter into Holy Week, I invite you to offer “one word prayers” both silent and spoken that you can hold onto and perhaps offers what another needs to hold on to as we enter into this Holy Week; words reflecting your thoughts, feelings, fears, hopes.....

May it all be so.

Anthem: Were You There vs 1 & 2

Closing Reflection ~ As a child I remember Palm Sunday – lots of energy, waving palms, singing hymns of conquest. And I remember Easter – my Easter outfit from Grampie- the dress, the shoes, the coat, the hat, the gloves, the purse, the tights, and yes, even the underwear. I remember our lamb cake coated with coconut frosting and surrounded by jelly beans. Easter

candy hunts including one year with real rabbit droppings. True story. I remember church on Easter Morning: The abundance of flowers ~ the hats and the gloves ~ my Dad and my Grampie joining my Mom and my Grandma, my sisters and me. I do not remember the darkness of Maundy Thursday or the tears of Good Friday. There was neither celebration nor mourning. Frankly, there was no acknowledgement of the truth of such horror in my foundation of Christian faith, no proclaiming never again what never should have happened, no expressions of disappointment, fear, guilt, grief in the midst of faith..... And I have always wondered why it is called “Good” Friday....

“Between Parades” #76 Ann Weems

Hymn: What Wondrous Love is This? # 223