**March 25, 2018**

**Mark 11:1-11**

 Another preaching friend of mine always asks people after reading the Bible, “where do you see yourself in the story?” So I ask you, where do you see yourself in this story?

Are you among the disciples? Insiders, witnesses to the miracles, the healings, the preaching? Still unsure where this all is leading, but you’re pretty sure you want a front row seat?

Are you in the crowds? Compelled by this powerful moment to join in the parade, wondering where the rest of this story is going?

Are you the donkey? (God uses all sorts.)

Or, perhaps, you are watching from a distance? Detached… ambivalent… maybe wondering where all of this is heading, but intent upon your to-do list for the coming week that won’t do itself…?

 This week, after people broke into our church and took things without warning, I find myself with those people whose donkey was stolen. I think about the time they cared for that young animal: how they had watched it grow, and fed it and trained it each day. I think about what it was being prepared to do – for they certainly had a plan for the animal: transportation or farming or simply to sell for income. Whatever their plan, it would have affected their care of the donkey. They might have named it or made a rope lead and halter for it. Certainly, it would not have gone easily or freely to strangers. This was a precious item that was strangely and suddenly repurposed. Did they follow their stolen donkey through town, tracking it in order to guarantee its safe return? Maybe they were the ones who actually led Jesus and the donkey through town?

 The stolen donkey is another one of those crazy details in this unbelievable week.

Jesus, our Savior, the Son of God, Creator of the Universe, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He who made and claimed everything – each person and palm and donkey. Jesus, the rightful ruler of Earth and Heaven, came to Jerusalem because creation had been stolen from him. Sin and death took hold of these people, and walked away with everything he loved. So Jesus came to reckon with them all. He came to reclaim his stolen goods. He came to set right the world’s biggest wrong. To do so, he could have snapped his fingers and given a show-stopping display of power. He could have worked with the authorities to reestablish his rightful power and justice. But instead, Jesus chose to restore and reclaim these stolen goods in a very different way.

Jesus loved them, and forgave them. He loved the people and forgave them as he marched to his death. He loved the disciples and forgave the many ways they would betray him. He loved the authorities; he abstained from physical or legal defense and forgave them their part in the drama. He loved the criminals crucified with him, and forgave them for their wrong doing. Everyone in town stole something from Jesus – from his dignity to his very life – yet everyone in town had themselves been stolen from Jesus. And because he loved them, he proceeded. Likely full of anger and a sense of betrayal already, he forgave them.

This is how God sets things right. This is how God delivers justice.

The empire uses military might and pomp and circumstance to display their power. The empire wears uniforms. Their titles convey self-importance and expected respect. The empire’s justice is delivered by trial, with serious penalties for those found guilty. The empire even murders people in their ultimate display of “justice.”

But Jesus was not part of the empire. Jesus paraded through Jerusalem in a march *against* the empire. Without fancy uniforms for himself or his followers, without musicians to trumpet his arrival or bring everyone into step, Jesus did not try to separate himself from the people he loved. Like those students who marched against gun violence yesterday, Jesus simply spoke truth to power. Like those students who marched in D.C. right up to the Capital, Jesus went right to the center of power in Jerusalem. Like those students in Salt Lake City who marched in the face of gun advocates, Jesus walked into town unarmed directly opposite Pilate’s military procession.

It was street theater at its finest.

This is the kingdom of God – forever flipping people’s expectations upside down. Jesus showed people that the kingdom of God isn’t about power and prestige and imperial authority; it’s about humility. The kingdom of God identifies with the poor and the oppressed, the diseased and isolated, the persecuted and peacemakers.

While the empire rode proud steeds into town, Jesus rode a baby donkey. The everyday transportation for common people. And it wasn’t even his. It was stolen… (well, maybe borrowed-under-pressure.)

While the empire rode in with weapons and troops to “maintain the peace” in a potentially turbulent time, Jesus and his disciples came in – unarmed – with palm branches. The kingdom of God isn’t about wealth and warriors.

So we ourselves join in the march. We wave palm branches, not guns. We pray for peace instead of arming to secure our safety. We sing hymns that tout God as Lord of our hearts and minds, not the empire.

It’s comical, it’s dramatic, it’s political. It’s the culmination of everything Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God, and it’s the set up for what is to come.

Wherever you find yourself in this text, the truth is that it’s all happening.

We know how it ends. We know what’s coming. We will gather as a community on Thursday night at 6pm to celebrate and remember Maundy Thursday. We will have a simple meal, share in Communion, as we remember Jesus’ Passover meal with friends. Then, the night will turn, and our remembrance will move into the Sanctuary to mark Good Friday. We will remember Jesus’ betrayal by friends, his public arrest, his private trial, and finally his death on the cross. We will leave in darkness, quietly…

Until we return for the first proclamation of Christ’s resurrection at next Saturday’s Easter Vigil. Telling the stories of our ongoing salvation through history, we will remember how much God loves us, and what to lengths God has gone for us.

Then, next Sunday morning we will gather as a community to celebrate and remember the resurrection. For we know that though Jesus died, he didn’t stay dead.

But not yet. We are still a week out.

**Find yourself here, in this story,** with the donkey and the palm branches. Witness the theatre that Jesus has created, the subversive commentary on the kingdoms of this world versus the kingdom of God.