**April 14, 2019**

**Luke 19:28-44**

Visiting ancient Jerusalem during the annual Passover festival was like visiting New York City around Christmas. People went there from all over the world, just as they come here. The city is alive, abuzz, international, exciting. Every room is rented at a premium price. Shelves are stocked to capacity. … So it was in Jerusalem; the whole world arrived on their streets. Jewish friends and neighbors visited with one another as they hadn’t done since the last major holiday. Expectation was in the air, waiting to see all the romance and ritual the week would bring.

To keep the peace, Roman soldiers – the occupiers – patrolled the city. They were uniformed and armored, on foot and horseback. They were definitely not friends with the Jewish population – visiting or local. Since the beginning of Roman occupation, the Jews had staged numerous uprisings trying to oust their invading force, so there was constant stress over who was in charge, and whose rules should be followed.

And until this point, Jesus’ followers had been rather passive. They could have been ignored or overlooked as they traipsed after Jesus all over Palestine; they were largely part of the scenery. When Jesus argued with civil and religious officials, the disciples watched on the sidelines, tense and riveted. When Jesus defended a prostitute, the disciples gasped with the crowd. When he spoke with a Samaritan woman, they winced. When he defied the Sabbath laws, they cringed. When he kissed lepers and healed broken bodies, they whispered in awe. Until this day, the followers of Jesus had been just *that*: followers.

But on Palm Sunday, a shift occurred. A transformation began.

Against the Roman display of power and authority, against and in defiance of it, Jesus’ followers staged a street drama announcing that their allegiance belonged to Jesus, Prince of Peace – *not* to Caesar, *not* to the Emperor of Rome. On the streets of Jerusalem in front of God and Rome and everybody, they announced that their allegiance was *not* with the *Pax Romana* – an uneasy and unstable peace achieved by **force** – but was with *Pax Christi*, a peace to which they (and we!) were **invited**, but never coerced. They placed their trust in the peace which comes from the very heart of God, the peace that passes all human understanding. And this was the day when they shouted – in public – that they belonged to God and *not* to Caesar, which in their case was an act of revolution and sedition.

From the day Jesus called the disciples away from their fishing nets right up until this moment, the commitment to follow Jesus had been personal. It had been intimate and private. But today, the commitment to follow Jesus became public and political.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees stood on the sidelines saying, “Shhhhhh! Be quiet! Everyone behave yourselves! Stop drawing attention to us.”

Palm Sunday was the day when the church came out of hiding. This was the day the church drew a line between itself and worldly power. This was the day when they vowed allegiance to Jesus, the King; Jesus, the Son of God. To him be all honor and glory and blessing! It was probably fun and easy to join the parade with praise and celebration. It was easy to be swept up in the crowd’s momentum, joyfully shouting support for your candidate.

So remember that the disciples didn’t know what was coming. They didn’t know the horror the week would hold. They didn’t know that their merry band would be scared and scattered. They didn’t know that their own mouths would betray their hearts. They didn’t know that some friends would become foes.

For over the next few days, the disciples saw Judas sell Jesus to the chief priests. They saw Peter, their stubborn friend, *deny* his allegiance to Christ. They saw Jesus himself weep and pray and bleed. They saw Jesus betrayed. They saw Jesus blindfolded and beaten, publicly humiliated, and marched to his death. Their joyful Palm parade transformed into an angry crowd demanding punishment for their beloved teacher. And where were they then? What happened to their Hosannas? What happened to their public declaration of faith? What happened to their willingness to declare allegiance to Christ’s kingdom over the Caesar’s?

That is the question for *us* today. Palm Sunday was not the end of the story, nor is it the end of ours. What happens after our shouts of “Hosanna”? When we are distracted by worldly power, glitz and glamor, what happens to our halleluias? What happens when the world directly – or (even harder) *indirectly* – pushes against our faith?

It is the story of the Prodigal Son. The one who (for some time) thought that the world had better things to offer than his family. It is the story of the rich young ruler who wasn’t quite ready to give up his worldly things. This is the story of many beloved movies from “Gone with the Wind” to “Mean Girls”.

And it is our story. Everyday. It is what happens when we lovingly celebrate our wedding anniversary one evening, then take out our stress and frustration on our spouse and family the very next day. This is the story of every substance abuser who quits on Sunday and fails on Monday. This story is what happens when pain and despair and anger and fear take over our bodies and minds, temporarily forcing our better selves to the sidelines. Remorse and regret will come soon enough, but those later moments don’t change the pain of the initial betrayal.

What happened after the disciples’ hosannas and halleluias faded away? Fear and pain took hold. Their passion, their joy, their best intentions of following God – they fell to the background. Jesus himself fell to his knees because of them. Because when we choose fear (an intrinsically selfish emotion) over faith, when we are caught up thinking about ourselves, other people become innocent victims of our tempers, our poor choices, our rash decisions. And on this week, God, too became an innocent victim.

Jesus suffered in this Holy Week. He wept and agonized and yelled and pleaded. And while God did not spare him or change Christ’s destiny, it was not an easy or pleasant week for them; and yet, they did it. In the face of waning Hosannas, while faith proclamations faded in the distance, Christ stepped closer and closer to the cross.

As Jesus drew closer to Jerusalem in today’s reading, he wept. He rode through the blessings and honors and glories, and wept. He was so frustrated that they didn’t recognize his presence. Even while his disciples stood on the street cheering, he also knew that they really *didn’t* know. They “did not recognize the time of God’s visitation.”

In our own lives, amidst our daily struggles between faith and worldly ways, can we recognize God for who God is and what God is doing? Can both our proclamation and discipleship be faithful to the triune God whom we love? Can our daily living reflect the values we espouse on Sunday morning?

Jesus told the disciples to tell the colt’s owner that “the Lord needs it.” The Lord needed a ride. The Lord needed a cheer. The Lord needed some faith. Now, what does the Lord need from you this week? Be careful not to leave your palms and praises in the street today. Walk with Jesus this week -- from today’s parade into the upper room. Spend time with God in prayer. Pray with him as he carries the cross, then wait with him at the tomb. These are difficult, wondrous days. Next Sunday can’t come soon enough. And that is where we learn *the rest* of the story. Thanks be to God! Amen.