**April 5, 2020**

**Matthew 21:1-11**

The whole point of this Palm Sunday event was to make a scene. And not just *any* scene, but a political scene. Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem was meant to resemble a royal procession; he was a rightful ruler marching down the main thoroughfare in front of his castle: his territory, his people, his Lordship. The townspeople knew political parades. They knew that the Roman empire used military might and pomp and circumstance to display its power. Leaders rode on groomed horses with hundreds of foot soldiers following. Drummers and horn-players brought the troops into step and alerted others of the coming ranks. Their uniforms and weapons demonstrated care and prestige, and their titles (Caesar and Governor and Commander and Centurion and such) conveyed self-importance and demanded respect. The empire used visual and emotional power as much as it did physical might.

But Jesus was not part of the empire. Jesus paraded through Jerusalem in a march *against* the empire. Jesus’ procession was meant to bring those familiar political images to mind, while also turning those images on their head. Without fancy uniforms for himself or his followers, without musicians to trumpet his arrival, Jesus did not try to separate himself from the people he loved. He walked into town unarmed, directly opposite Pilate’s military procession. His ragtag band of followers came without rank or warning, waving palm branches instead of weapons. Jesus himself used the everyday transportation for common people (a donkey). And it wasn’t even his donkey. The Palm Sunday parade was street theater at its finest. In this, Jesus showed people that the kingdom of God wasn’t about power and prestige and imperial authority; Christ’s kingdom came with humility, identifying with everyday people, the poor and the oppressed, the diseased and isolated, the persecuted and peacemakers.

While I have participated in Palm Sunday activities every year that I can remember, most of my celebrations have not been so humble. I have sung in choirs accompanied by extra brass instruments – trumpets and trombones – who were specially hired for Palm Sunday festivities. I have purchased extra supplies to make special crafts. I have hunted for Easter Eggs and eaten candy by the gallon. I have paraded around a few church buildings and neighborhoods, but only with church members; never were neighbors or strangers invited to join our band of enthusiastic Christians dressed in our Sunday best.

But this year… This year, life is so so different. This year the church cannot host any Palm Sunday festivities. We cannot get together for an in-house celebration. We cannot go outside together to wave our spiritual flag. This year we are not wearing new clothes or hosting special dinners or other traditional commemorations. This year we are left to celebrate the essence of Christ’s Lordship in very humble, personal ways. Which feels sad and uncomfortable and more authentic.

Yesterday Huck and I had a parade. It was only a parade of 2, but we were still a parade. He wore his blue bike helmet and his green monster coat. He saddled up his blue balance bike and led the way down our street while I followed in my black exercise pants and everyday jacket, hair down, no makeup, no earrings. I pulled a small red wagon behind me, filled with miniature daffodils (the same ones that you should have received this weekend). Our wagon made quite a lot of noise going across all the potholes in our neighborhood – rattling and banging and jolting down the street – so people were watching out their windows for what the heck was going on, while the other early birds running and walking outside moved to the other side of the street long before we got to them. We intended our parade to go to church members’ houses, but along the way we ended up passing out extra flowers to curious neighbors whose eyes we caught. “Happy Easter!” we yelled and waved. We didn’t plan for those encounters. It was unexpected – and inasmuch, it prompted authentic encounters. People couldn’t hide their amusement at our commotion and unexpected load. There were some twinkling eyes and smiles and waves. There were a lot of, “How are you doing?”s followed by an equal number of weary, “Well… meh…”

It got me thinking that people *think* they like a show. We think we like the pop and pizzazz, pomp and circumstance, but what we really like is an intentional, authentic offering. Especially when times are tough. Especially when a crisis is on the horizon or even on your doorstep. People like things that are approachable and relatable. (This in itself may explain why some people *don’t* come to church – they think worship is unrelatable and loaded with theatrical displays, instead of action that has bearing on their everyday lives.) Those on the sidelines need to see themselves in what’s happening around them in order to want to participate. And a parade or a movement will not take hold unless the people on the sidelines can relate to the main action and *then* want to participate. (If people aren’t interested in Irish culture, the St. Patrick’s Day parade probably isn’t a fun thing to do. If someone doesn’t ski or do winter sports, they probably don’t shop at the Sno-Haus on Jericho Tpke.)

The church has not always done a good job of being approachable and relatable to mainstream populations. We use strange words like “salvation” and do strange things like wearing specific things at specific times of the year – purple for Advent and Lent, white for Christmas and Easter. We sing as a group (one of the few times when people still sing together, not just soloists here!), and process and recess and get on our knees and stand up and sit down and raise our hands and lower our heads in highly choreographed moves… but Jesus never asked for any of this.

Jesus brilliantly met the people on their level. He borrowed a donkey. His disciples met people on the road. They welcomed people with what they had, saw people for who they really were, and invited them to join along.

Instead of missing all the glory that you expect from church this year, perhaps this is an invitation for us to add our humble “Hosanna”s from wherever we *really* are. In our pajamas 20 hours of each day 😊, grateful for some extra down time or depressed from this forced isolation, anxious about a missed paycheck, grieving the changes that have happened so quickly, delighted that you finally have time to binge-watch all those shows you’ve missed, confident that God will heal the world’s ills, or questioning where God has been these past weeks… wherever you are, however you are, Christ is coming to you without any need for you to change or put on airs or makeup or whatever else it seems the world requires. Christ is coming to town this week because God loves you for exactly who you are and knows exactly what you need: salvation in the form of love and grace and mercy.

Jesus told the disciples to tell the donkey’s owner that, “The Lord needs it.” Well, friends, the Lord needs us. Join the parade from your seat on the sidelines. Shout “Hosanna” with abandon in your backyard. Wave to a neighbor whose face is pressed against the window. Be ready to respond to God’s invitation wherever you are with whatever you have, loving God and neighbors, and proclaiming the good news that Christ is King. “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna!” Amen.