

“When The Streets Became Silent”

Luke 22:14-23:56

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I never know what to do with Palm Sunday. Usually we have a Cantata and I let the choir do the heavy lifting. But today, they are practicing social distancing.

The problem with Palm Sunday is that we need to cover enough ground to move us through Holy Week to Easter Sunday. Many people don't attend services during Holy Week so there are several missing pieces. A lot can happen in one week.

Today we enter worship with Hosannas and a parade of sorts. Jesus making his way into Jerusalem for his final journey. Some have said that there is evidence that there was another procession that day, a Roman procession entering from the west, honoring the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The idea that there might have been two processions offer quite a contrast.

One procession was a clear expression of power with military whose goal was to make sure oppressed people remained oppressed. Fine horses lead the way and weapons were clearly visible, reminding the people who was in charge.

The other procession was very different, a donkey lead the way and people lined the road with branches and their coats. The humble one who rode on the animal, came in the name of the Lord and proclaimed a peaceful reign of God.

Throughout his ministry Jesus spoke of a new kingdom a kingdom that had nothing in common with the powerful ones who sought to maintain the status quo. Some said that would be the death of him.

On Palm Sunday. . . it is the responsibility of the preacher to give you the story of what happened that week. I'd love to do that . . . but there are over 130 verses to cover in one gospel alone and there are 4 gospel writers giving you their best.

So I am going to trust that you will go home and pick up your Bible. Read the story from Mark. And the next day pick up John or Matthew or Luke. . . begin at the moment when the last pilgrim to enter Jerusalem . . . dropped the palm branch he held clutched in his hand and moved on.

When the streets became silent.

If you close your eyes for a moment, you might be able to recreate the opening scene . . . Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem the week of Passover when crowds numbered as many as 3 million. . . some were hopeful for a revolutionary. . . one who would come and fight city hall. . . one who would bring relief from the oppressive Roman government.

And for a moment it looked like Jesus might well be the one. . . as he moves into the Temple and begins to throw out the tables of the money lenders. . . stirring up the anger of the religious leaders.

The text at the end of Luke 19 reads: Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

So what happened in that week that turned the tides against Jesus. . . We hold the book . . . we know the story but perhaps a reminder highlights would be helpful.

Mid week Jesus sits at table with his beloved disciples and as he tries to prepare them for what is to come . . . they bicker over which one is the greatest. .

Jesus takes them to the garden to pray . . . and they fall asleep. . . Peter promises to stand by Jesus no matter what happens and he Cannot

Judas betrays Jesus into the hands of those who will take his life.

The religious leaders gather to find a way to bring Jesus to trial

Pilate does his best to stay out of it and he fails

Barabbas a notorious criminal is given his freedom and Jesus is sentenced to death.

Simon of Cyrene comes walking along coming from the country and he is given a cross to carry for a man that he does not know.

A crowd gathers. . . another parade in the making. . . .

A lot can happen in one week.

This week . . this holy week. we live between two parades . . one that sees Jesus entering Jerusalem with shouts of Hosannas. The other where hundreds of curious people line the streets of Jerusalem to watch as three men walk through the city bearing crosses.

You need to read the whole story. . . don't let some preacher try to interpret it for you. Take some time this week and read and ponder abit.

In our tradition we do not dwell on the passion of Christ. We proclaim that we serve a Risen Lord. . .we are Easter People.

And while that is true, there is something in the stories leading up to Easter that beg our attention. Why? Because we live in a world. . . that sometimes frightens us and fills us with despair and reminds us that we are not in control.

I heard a true story that helped me understand the complexity of the Easter Message. A message that brings fear and despair alongside of joy and amazement so that they walk hand in hand.

Years ago a week before Easter Sunday. . . an event happened that was to change the lives of all the people in Piedmont, Alabama.

Hannah, a four year old who was filled with life and energy, found delight in every moment every day. The smallest things caught her attention and brought her joy. Rainbows. . .autumn leaves. . the way an owl's head turns all the way around.

She never saw a tree that she did not want to climb.. . or a rock that she did not want to slip into her pocket and carry home.

One ordinary afternoon on a trip to the grocery store, she asked her mother one of her famous Hannah questions. . .

Will you and Daddy and Sarah and I all die at the same time?

Her mother was startled.. . where had that come from? She answered her inquisitive child gently. . . Well she said. . we may not all die at the same time. . but we will all be together again . . someday.

Hannah spoke her own truth. . . when you die you go to live with God. . .and then she hopped out of the car and ran to look for more questions.

Palm Sunday came early that year. Hannah's mother was the minister at the Methodist church in Piedmont Alabama. Hannah sat in the front row grinning up at her mother. . and suddenly without warning. . a tornado roared into the town of Piedmont and in its path was the Goshen United Methodist Church. It was over in a matter of minutes.

The pastor rushed from the pulpit. All around the sanctuary people cried out in confusion and fear. . there was devastation everywhere.

The pastor searched for her own children. She looked toward the nursery hallway and saw someone holding her youngest. . and then she begin to work with others to move concrete and steel beams. .

and there she saw it. . a piece of blue and white fabric. . peeking out from behind the front pew.

Hannah and nineteen others died that Palm Sunday morning. Eighty six more were injured. In the Holy Week that followed, funerals were held every day and the town was so crushed by the disaster that some wondered how they would find the strength to go on.

The pastor was so stunned by her own grief that she could not see a future for this little congregation. But then the phone began to ring.

People wanted to know if there would be an Easter Service. The same people who had lost loved ones. . some were grieving great loss . . .others were healing from physical injuries . . these same people were wondering about Easter . . they were longing for Easter. . they needed Easter!

Friends we need Easter. PAUSE

Easter reminds us that we are meant to live our lives as a people surrounded by a hope that is in Christ. This hope does not promise us that we will never suffer . . . that we will never be afraid . . . that we will never grieve. It is a different kind of hope.

It is a hope that assures us of the presence of God among us. Reminding us that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Easter is about a God who creates a way when there is no way.

Friends we need Easter. We need to be reminded each and every Sunday . . each and every day, that even though life is full of hardships and difficulties beyond our imagining like Corona virus . . .even still we are held by a God who will never let us go.

I hope to see you all next week. We'll be celebratingEaster.

Amen!