

Matthew 21:1-11  
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Philippians 2:5-11

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday  
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island  
April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
The Rev. Karen Haig

The irony of this day has never been quite so poignant for me. As we make the turn from Lent to Holy Week, Jesus makes the turn from “Hail and Hosanna” to “Crucify him, crucify him!” Everything about this particular Sunday is ironic, and that is perfect for us because we are living into the greatest irony ever. As Christians, our call is to love the world back into wholeness by pouring God’s love into the world, by loving our neighbors. Whoever would have thought that the best way to love our neighbors was to walk into our homes, shut our doors behind us and stay away from them?

Jesus prepared himself and his friends for this triumphal return to Jerusalem just as he prepared them for what was to follow. Matthew’s gospel makes it clear that Jesus knew what was going to happen – he’d already predicted his suffering, death and resurrection three times. He knew where the donkey was and where the Passover meal would be eaten. Jesus knew precisely who he was and what he was being called to do, and the stories we’ve been hearing throughout Lent are all given so we can recognize him too. Do you remember the Samaritan woman at the well who told her neighbors to *“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”* John 4:29. Or the man born blind who exclaimed *“Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”* John 9:32-33. And just last Sunday, we heard Jesus tell Martha that *“...everyone who lives and believes in me will never die,”* then asked her *“Do you believe this?”* She said to him, *“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”* John 11: 26-27.

As bizarre as this Lent has been, the scriptures have been given to us in order to draw us back to the story that is bigger than a virus, a story, our story, that holds the whole of human experience. The scriptures have been preparing us for this day and for the week ahead. We’ve come to recognize Jesus through the stories of his encounters with all sorts of people, and my guess is, that in these difficult times, we may be recognizing Jesus in ways we haven’t before. He has been revealed as the Messiah, the Holy one of God, the one who has come to save the world, and he’s not just been revealed to the people in the stories. He’s been revealed to us too. No wonder there’s a big parade. It’s the Messiah, the one everyone’s been waiting for!

The people who lined the road and threw down their coats at that long-ago Palm Sunday parade had waited a very long time for the promised Messiah, and they thought they had a pretty good idea of who he would be. They expected a mighty King, one who would overthrow the Roman occupiers, seize political power and bring back the good life from the time when King David ruled the land. They weren’t so different from people today...when things are hard, humans seem to

want an all-powerful God, a God who will reach down fix things. But that isn't God's nature. God doesn't swoop in and fix things. God comes to us in great vulnerability, not with power and might. That's because we are vulnerable creatures. We know that today in ways we never have before.

Those people who threw their coats on the ground and yelled "Hosanna!" wanted a king. And they got a king in Jesus. He just didn't turn out to be the kind of king they had expected.

*Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him...* That's the kind of king he was. And that's the biggest irony of all.

As he rode into Jerusalem, Jesus brought the power of God's love as his only weapon. It was a confusing time, a tumultuous time, and while it all seemed really exciting, it was a very, very scary time. Jesus threatened both the political and religious rulers of his time because the law he taught was the law of love. And the law of love doesn't recognize the sort of power wielded by the occupying government or the religious authorities. The law of love doesn't recognize power that allows a few to have much and most to have little, doesn't recognize power that sets people against one another because they don't look like each other or think like each other or because they call God by a different name.

The law of love is the law that recognizes each and every human being as God's own beloved. The law of love is what gets healthcare workers and hospital chaplains out of bed every morning to go back to work in the trenches. The law of love is what compels us to sew masks, ensure that children who aren't in school get lunch, check in with one another, donate where we can, give to our neighbors who have lost their jobs. The law of love is what encourages us to leave the second package of paper towels on the shelf because other people need them too. And all of this is because love is greater, far greater than fear.

As it turns out, Jesus is just as threatening today as he was 2,000 years ago. His power, the power of God's boundless love, is the only power that can overthrow the hatred and injustice that gets stirred up when self-serving powers employ scare tactics to set us against one another, whether the fight is about the color of our skin or who gets the ventilators. The power of love is the only power that can soften hardened hearts, heal heartsick and weary souls, sustain us through another month inside our houses. Love really is stronger than fear, stronger than hate, stronger than rage, stronger than money or power or prestige or privilege or any virus that ever was or will be. The power of love is stronger even than death. And that's the story we're going to live into in the coming week.

I know it can be tempting to want to skip the hard parts, to delight in the Palm Sunday parade and then skip straight through to Easter when we can join another parade, this time shouting Alleluia, He is risen! But oh my dears, what a poverty it is not to immerse ourselves in

everything that happens in between the “Hosannas” and the “Alleluias.” And just think, this year you can do it all from your own living room! Our experience of Holy Week will be very different this year, but this is our story, our journey and while we won’t all be in the same place, we will still get to make the journey together.

There may be some reluctance to walk with Jesus’ through this last and most holy week of his life. There is enough suffering in the “real world” we say, I don’t want to go through suffering for the sake of suffering. And if it were suffering for the sake of suffering, I wouldn’t go either. But none of Jesus life, and not even his death was for the sake of suffering. It was all for the sake of love. For love of God and for love of us. Each one of us. It was for the love of this very community, just as much as it was for the love of his father and his mother and the disciples and all those people he had walked with throughout his too-short life. When we make the journey through holy week, when we allow ourselves to fully enter into each one of the beautiful and moving liturgies, we will come to the Easter resurrection filled with a joy that is unimaginable to those who came directly from the Palm Sunday parade.

The events of Holy Week are not easy. They weren’t easy for Jesus and his friends, and they aren’t easy for us. That’s because the fullness of life is not easy. It’s complicated and beautiful and difficult and very, very messy. Holy Week embodies all of that. Embodies all our questions, our suffering, our heartaches and our joys. Holy Week helps us to see God at work in every aspect of our lives, not waving a magic wand to disappear the heartache, but making meaning out of everything we experience and turning everything, finally, into love.

You see, God isn’t with us only on Sundays or only in church. In Holy Week, just as in every other week of our very real lives, God is present and calling and loving and making meaning of every single moment of our lives. We only need to be present on the journey. So join us on the journey through Holy Week and find your place in God’s great story. Walk with Jesus through this last week of his life. It’s a journey like no other, and it just might change you forever. Amen.