

Luke 19:28-40/Luke 22:14-23:56
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29/ Psalm 31:9-16
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11

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

The Last Upside-Down Week

Welcome home! Isn't it wonderful to be worshipping together in church again? It is so good to be here with you. It's been quite a ride, hasn't it? I actually thought we might be back in the church last summer, when we assumed we were through with the "inconveniences" of COVID. But just when it seemed there was a light at the end of the tunnel, Omicron reared its ugly head and blotted out our hopes. But finally, here we are, and I'm so glad. We couldn't have picked a better day. Palm Sunday is the most up and down, back and forth, upside down day of the year, a perfect descriptor of the last couple of years and a perfect introduction to all of the many things we'll experience as we make our way through the last, most Holy Week of Jesus' life. This coming week, we'll experience all the highs and lows and hopes and fears Jesus' first followers experienced. We'll experience many of them today, too. Today, as we move from Palm Sunday's Glory, Laud and Honor to the shouts of "Crucify him," we will begin to experience the myriad and disparate emotions of Jesus' last week on earth.

The readings we've heard throughout Lent 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 the devil, with the Pharisees, with Martha and Mary and Lazarus. Jesus has been revealed as the Messiah, the Holy one of God, the one who has come to save the world, the one who stands with us and for us, the one who embodies belovedness, and shows us how to love. These stories are for us, not just for the people Jesus encountered in them. Jesus has been revealed to us too. No wonder there's a big parade. Finally, the Messiah, the one everyone's been waiting for has arrived!

The people who lined the road, who threw down their coats and shouted "Hosanna" that long-ago day, had waited a very long time for the promised Messiah. Do you know what Hosanna means? It doesn't mean "Hooray for Jesus." It means "save now." Those people's hosannas cried out for a savior and our "Hosannas" cry out for a savior just the same. "Hosanna, Jesus." Save us now. The people who lined the road to Jerusalem expected a mighty King to save them, 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. And they did get a king. He just wasn't the kind of king they 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 as he rode into Jerusalem, he brought the power of God's love as his only weapon.

On the other side of the city, the Roman legions were making a different parade. As he did each year at Passover, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem so the power of the Empire would be in full view at the Jewish Festival. Passover is the time when Jews remember their liberation from slavery and rejoice in their freedom. That made the authorities nervous. So nervous in fact, that in this particular year, Pilate moved his royal headquarters from the sea to the city, just to keep an eye on things. 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 day because the law he taught was the law of love. And the law of love doesn't recognize the sort of power the occupying Roman government wielded. 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 alike or think alike 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.

Jesus is just as threatening today as he was some 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 is stirred up when self-serving people and powers set us against one another. The power of love is the only power that can soften hardened hearts, heal heartsick and weary souls, sustain us through the inevitable highs and lows of what it is to be human. Love really is stronger than fear, stronger than hate, stronger than rage, stronger than money or power or prestige or privilege or 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.

This is our story, as complicated, messy, difficult, and glorious as it is. I know it can be tempting to want to skip the hard parts, to delight in the Palm Sunday parade and then tomorrow just go back to school or to work and back to our ordinary lives. It's tempting to want to 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. I understand our reluctance to walk with Jesus' through this last most holy week of his life. There is enough suffering in the "real world" - we 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 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 mother and the disciples and all those people he encountered throughout his too-short life.

When we make the journey through holy week together, 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. Don't wait until next Sunday to come back! Come to church on Tuesday night for our Service of

Healing and Reconciliation and prepare for all that is to come by letting go of your burdens and knowing God's love and grace poured out just for you. Come immerse yourself in contemplation, beautiful music, and the opportunity to offer up all your hurts and heartaches to the God who loves you more than life itself.

Bring your whole family on Maundy Thursday when we will have supper together, sharing communion at table with our friends just as Jesus did on that last night with his friends. Listen to him as he reminds us that unless we humble ourselves enough to let him wash our feet, we can have no part in him. Come to the garden, hear the story of his arrest, stay with him through the night to keep watch.

And don't be afraid to come back on Friday, that most difficult day we call "good..." You will feel the greatest love of all that day, palpable in the story of the God who chose to experience every single aspect of what it is to be human.

And, when we have walked alongside Jesus, feeling the love of deep friendship, the heartache of betrayal, the seeming loss of everything that is good, we will come to the Easter Vigil knowing that God is in absolutely everything and that love always, always wins. Our Easter Vigil is for the whole family! Bring your kids and your grandkids in their jammies, come gather around the fire, hear the ancient stories, and welcome 5 dear souls into the God's family and ours in Baptism. Bring your noisemakers and experience the thrill of the very first Eucharist of Easter. The joy of resurrection experienced in the Easter Vigil is like nothing else!

The events of Holy Week are not easy. They weren't easy for Jesus and his friends, and they aren't easy for us. Yet Holy Week embodies all our questions, all our suffering, all our heartaches and all our joy. Holy Week helps us to see God at work in every aspect of our lives, not waving a magic wand to disappear the sadness, but making meaning out of everything we experience and turning everything, finally, into love.

You see, God isn't with us only on Sundays. In Holy Week, just as in every other week of our very real lives, God is present and calling and loving and making meaning in all of the Monday through Saturday in-between times too. Join us on the journey 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. Come with us because the journey is how you know. Amen.