

March 28, 2021. Palm Sunday Rev. Kathryn McGinnis

Let us pray,

If we could buy our way closer to you, we'd sell everything we have.

If we could work our way to you, we'd never take a day off.

If we could walk our way to you, we'd keep our tennis shoes on tight.

But I know—we know—we cannot buy, or work, or walk our way closer to you.

We must listen our way closer to you.

So Holy God, as you have so often done again and again, open our ears.

Clear out the self-talk that keeps us from you. Dust out the negativity and distractions. Remove any doubt hindering our way. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, verses 1 through 11. Listen now for the Word of the Lord.

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

I am tired. Tired of this past year, tired of the painful and violent news that keeps streaming in – just these past two weeks there have been three violent shootings: the first in Georgia killed 8 people, 6 of whom were Asian American women. Then this past week in boulder Colorado. 10 people were shot and

murdered at a supermarket – one being an on-duty officer. More were injured. Then just two days ago – on Friday- two people are dead and at least 8 others wounded in separate shootings at Virginia Beach.

Then the kind of bizarre and strange news of the large container ship “Ever Given” – a ship so large that it is almost as long as the empire state building is tall, is stuck in Suez Canal, blocking trade around the world. 321 other ships are stuck in the canal as a result, unable to turn around. The canal handles about 12% of the world trade. This is bound to be a devastating hit to world trade, trade that has already been hit this past year by the worldwide lockdown.

But what makes me most tired, is that this seems to be a normal news week for this past year. Shootings after shootings, world disaster after world disaster, have all flooded in week after week all while we’ve been stuck at home – our own world disrupted.

But there is hope – we feel so close to being back together again. Santa Cruz county covid numbers keep dropping dramatically – the orange tier is in sight.

By now, I believe much of our congregation is vaccinated, and we will be together (outside) in person next week to celebrate Easter.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Thus, the thought, just get through it, just get through Palm Sunday, creeps into my mind.

The scripture for today – Jesus’ arrival on a donkey into Jerusalem – the story that marks the beginning of the passion narrative – is a story you’ve probably heard time and time again.

It’s celebratory account of the people almost worshipping Jesus like a Rockstar, throwing their cloaks down and waving palms as he enters Jerusalem on a donkey – fulfilling the old testament prophet Zechariah’s account of the messiah riding on a donkey.

This story is in all the gospels, and while all of this does take place in Mark’s account- our scripture for today – Mark’s telling of the story is much more muted. It gets to the point, it is focused on details and planning and procedure, and it doesn’t seem to bask in celebration of Jesus, rather – it just seems to get through it. Jesus just seems to want to get through it.

We don’t really feel the breakthrough of Joy like we do in the other accounts, instead I feel tension, strain, perhaps even some anxiety.

In Mark’s account, I think more than any other account, you feel the tension between the celebration Jesus is receiving from the people now, and the humiliation, pain, and death that he will receive from the same people in just days’ time. He just seems to want to get through it.

I find myself falling into that same trap over and over again. Just get through this – just get through that – but here’s the thing.

There is always something next to get through. It’s a never-ending cycle. And it leads to exhaustion. And the cycle is ten-fold for Jesus the Christ – the Messiah – who has previously 3 times told his disciples about his death and resurrection and they just never get it.

They only see Christ as who they want Christ to be. Not as he truly is. I can’t image what that must feel like for Jesus. To know exactly who you are, what is to come, to know you will suffer and die for these people are out of the purest form of love there is – God’s love – and yet – they won’t even see you for who you are. Even when you tell them plainly.

Jesus’ ride in Jerusalem is then a last attempt to yet again tell the people what kind of messiah he truly is. Riding a donkey was a common method of transportation at the time – so Jesus riding a donkey wasn’t unusual in and of itself. But Jesus the messiah riding a donkey shows his humility, his commitment to peace.

You must contrast Jesus, the king of the Jews riding into Jerusalem in peace, humbly on a donkey to the Roman rulers riding victoriously into Jerusalem on mighty steeds. Two very different pictures. To very different ideas of a king.

And though the people cheered for Jesus then on the donkey, the crucifixion to come so very soon points to the type of king they actually wanted – one on a mighty steed.

Just get through it. But this is something more than to just get through. And Jesus knows this too.

Mark’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem allows for moments of quiet that the other gospels don’t.

It allows for moments of meticulous details. For moments of tension.

It creates space for me to think about what Jesus must have felt as he laid out those specific instructions for his disciples, and then waited for them to follow them. Was he nervous? Was he calm?

What moments of quiet are we missing when we just try to get through it?

What have we learned this past year that we will forget if we only focus on getting through it?

Will we forget how communities came together to show incredible resilience and support for each other? Will we forget that we learned we still have a ways to go towards repenting for the sins of racism and white supremacy in our country?

Will we forget how moving things online and working from home made things more accessible – how we've been able to worship with people all over since physical space is no longer a separation?

That's Christ at work. And if we've only focused on getting through it - we might miss it.

We cannot just get through it. We must live it. Learn from it. And we must see Christ's redemption in it.

Christ knows this – and seems to leave spaces in his arrival into Jerusalem for us to find redemption.

Verse 11: “then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the 12.”

He looked. Christ looked around – what was he looking for? Was he looking for us – to finally see him?

I wonder what it would have been like, if you or I were in that temple – and a tired and maybe anxious Christ entered late – what if as he looked around for one last attempt – what if we actually saw him? Locked eyes with him and saw him for what he truly was - The prince of peace – who rides a donkey?

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. We are all tired of this life in lockdown, of these endless tragedies and injustices, and I have hope an end is upon us.

But don't just get through these final weeks, don't just get through this Palm Sunday – the second Palm Sunday in isolation.

Christ's redemption is at work in these moments still. Christ is still looking – we need only see him.

We're about to wave our palms together, my hope is that our computer screens will light up a flurry of green waves as we do celebrate the Christ's entry into Jerusalem – the beginning of the passion.

But as you wave - wave for the ways you see Christ's redemption at work today, in these moments where it's tempting to just get through. For this is where Christ is looking for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.