

March 24 Palm Sunday – 2024

For Israel in the time of Jesus, Passover was their March Madness. Jerusalem was one big party, overcrowded with pilgrims. There were contenders from every power conference, all hoping to come out on top. There were the underdogs, the political rebels, and the disciples. There were the perennial contenders, the religious professionals. There were the first-time new believers, there were the regulars and rowdies. And of course, the representatives of the greatest power conference of all, and the odds-on favorites, the Romans.

At that ancient season, there was also a true superstar with a real comeback story, Lazarus, who had been resurrected. Jesus rode into the center of this human storm quiet and unafraid; he was the serene eye of what became a horrendous hurricane of Good Friday.

For us, parades are often benign celebratory events, but this parade was rife with political intrigue. The raising of Lazarus had split the crowd. Some Jews were so impressed that they began to believe in Jesus and had a recently revived faith. Some were so upset that they wanted to kill Jesus and Lazarus. Those were the priests, the religious who were probably still upset about the Temple cleansing and who, because they were of the party of the Sadducees, did not believe in the resurrection. And of course, there were the regulars, the disciples who were always following. There were the realists, like the Pharisees who began to get frustrated when they could not co-opt Jesus for their own agendas, saying with cruel foreshadowing, “The whole world has gone after him.”

Everyone wanted to be number one. But not everybody in the Holy Week Bracket would make it to the end of this madness. Judas would betray Jesus, Peter will deny him, the disciples will abandon him, and the crowd, the Pharisees, and Sadducees will turn on him. The Roman leader Pilate would forever be immortalized in the Apostle’s Creed when centuries of worshipers reciting these haunting historical lines, “Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried under Pontius Pilate.”

Yet, by his own choice, Jesus was a rider into that storm, willing to risk everything for us. In John's Gospel, he rides into the lives of the ostracized Samaritan woman, the naive Nathan, the conflicted Nicodemus, the sorrowful synagogue leader whose child was dying. He rode gently into the silent storms of the ill, the hungry, the hopeless, and the doubting.

And in the midst of those storms, he gave hope. I quoted my good friend Doctor Kris Hermon at the beginning of the service. Kris graduated from Medical School and came back to the Church and met with me and asked what she could do to serve. I still remember us sitting outside on the church grounds. There was a quiet storm in her life. She was single, living on a Ranch, and just beginning a practice as a Pediatrician. She said to me, "I don't know what I want to do, but I want to do the right thing." Her father was very active in the Saint Vincent DePaul society, and her mother was an active Presbyterian. Kris wanted to help the poor and needy, to give back. She eventually became an Elder, organized feeding crews for our homeless program, and became an Ordained Lay Elder who preached and was authorized to serve the Lord's Supper.

Once when she preached on Palm Sunday, the text was from the gospel of Mark and it says that Jesus "found a colt that had never been ridden." When we were looking at this text, she said, "When I heard that Jesus rode an unbroken colt, I knew he was God." I said, "What about his other miracles, walking on water, healing the sick, raising the dead?" She said, "I am a Doctor, and I see incredible miraculous breakthroughs in Medicine all the time, but I grew up on a ranch, and no one, no one rides an unbroken colt unless they are God. God rode into her life and calmed her storm; that is the message of Holy Week. That is my prayer for all of us here at Trinity Presbyterian Church."