

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church
Palm SUNDAY, April 5, 2020
JESUS CRIED
Luke 19:30-40

Before I read today's scripture, I want to set the background. Every year at Passover time hundreds, if not thousands, of Israelites poured into Jerusalem, the Holy city, to celebrate Passover. And, every year at that time, Herod came to Jerusalem. He rode into town in the midst of the crowds, on a mighty warhorse, accompanied by an entourage of soldiers. He was demonstrating that he was large and in charge. He wanted to make sure they were aware of the emperor's power and to show he was ready to suppress any challenges to Roman domination.

Hear now what the scriptures tell us about how Jesus entered the city.

(READ SCRIPTURE)

Jesus was not riding on a warhorse. He was riding on a borrowed donkey. He was not accompanied by soldiers, he was accompanied by unarmed disciples and a crowd of people who believed that he was indeed their long awaited Messiah. His purpose was to demonstrate God's rule is very different from that of Rome's emperor. Instead of signaling domination or revolution, Jesus comes in peace.

The people are excited. They had been told by the prophets that the messiah would come to them riding on a donkey. So, when they saw Jesus on a donkey, and they had heard about all that he had been doing, healing and performing miracles, they began to cheer and large crowds gathered and followed him into the city. They spread their cloaks on the animals and on the road and they were waving palm branches. This was the traditional Jewish reception for royalty.

They have waited long for their messiah and they want to crown Jesus as their king. They are waiting for Jesus to call them to arms. But, Jesus does not call the people to rise up against their oppressors. He does not gather arms that would be needed to overthrow the government.

They are confused.

As they come to the Holy City...they sense something is wrong. Jesus is crying.

Why?

Wherever Jesus looked he found cause for weeping. The religious leaders had been plotting against him. He had been warned that they wanted to have him killed. They didn't recognize him as their long awaited messiah. When he got to the temple he was appalled. The merchants had turned God's holy temple into a marketplace that truly abused those who came to worship.... in frustration and anger, he overturned the tables of the money changers. Of course, this only further incited those who were plotting against him.

As he looked at the people he could see that although they had come to celebrate Passover, it was just another ritual...their hearts were heavy with sin and with life's burdens.

I don't know about you but as I waved my palm this morning, I too felt a little like crying. Here we are at the beginning of this most holy of weeks and as much as we want to celebrate and be filled with glad Hosannas – our hearts are heavy. Here I am speaking to an empty sanctuary. You are probably sitting alone or with just a few family members, and our Hosannas echo in the emptiness of our hearts. Perhaps tears are really more appropriate during these difficult days than shouts of joy. Today, if we are honest, we are feeling disappointment and a bit of grief over the ways our lives have changed in the past few weeks. Perhaps those emotions can better help us to share in this last week of Jesus life as we remember his pain and suffering.

Last weekend, I had a time of deep sadness and loneliness. I was feeling sorry for myself. Woe is me. Life is not fair! I am alone! I'm not much of one to weep, but during this pity party, I shed a few tears. I finally, gave myself a quick kick in the backside, and started cleaning my bathroom and bedroom. Cleaning is therapeutic for me. It made me realize that I was being very self-centered and that I had a great deal for which to be thankful. I wasn't weeping for all those who were suffering, I was weeping for myself.

Jesus was weeping, not for himself. He was weeping because he knew that the people who praised him would soon seek to crucify him when he didn't mount the rebellion they wanted.

Today we join the crowds of people that surrounded Jesus on that day on the road to Jerusalem. We wave our palm branches but with little enthusiasm because we know what will happen next in the story. We, too, proclaim that he is indeed the Messiah, the King, the Son of God. Yet, we know that just like the crowds, there are times when we are disappointed that Jesus doesn't shake his fist, gather his angels and throw out all the evil and pain and misery in this world and establish his kingdom of peace and love right here, right now! We want him to stop this virus that is killing so many and causing such disruption in our lives.

We want to be done with this isolation. Jesus, come help us. But Jesus doesn't always solve our problems for us. He gives us the gifts and wisdom to solve them ourselves.

We want Jesus to do something for us that he did not do for himself. Jesus did not stop the events that led to his death on a cross.

This week we will remember those events. This will not be easy. Our emotions are already raw from all we have been through in the past several weeks, and we would just as soon skip remembering the betrayals, the pain, the suffering, and just skip ahead to the resurrection, but I believe if we walk this journey with Jesus, we will find our love for him will be even deeper, our gratitude even greater, our worship even more meaningful because we will better understand what he did for each one of us.

We have gathered in our various homes this morning to celebrate the Lordship of Jesus and to proclaim him as our Savior, but we too come with hearts that are heavy with sin, with disappointment, and frustration, and with life's burdens. These past weeks have only added to our already heavy burdens. We still continue to battle financial troubles, marital problems, loneliness, addictions, mental and physical illness, grief...the list goes on and on. It is hard to wait for the day when the kingdom of peace and love will prevail and all pain and suffering will end.

Yet, dear friends, we know that Jesus was willing to make that journey from the cheering crowds that marked Palm Sunday, to the jeering crowds that ridiculed and insulted him, to the cross where he suffered and died, and to the grave, where we know he was victorious over sin and death. The good news for all of us is that in the end we, too, will be victorious.

So, I encourage you to come on this journey with us. On Thursday evening, join Pastor Cathy on Facebook LIVE as she reads the scriptures and together we join in communion, remembering that last meal Jesus shared with his disciples.

Then on Good Friday, join us at your convenience on our website to participate in the **stations of the cross**. This will include readings of the journey that takes Jesus to the cross and his crucifixion.

Next Sunday, Mary Magdalene will come and tell you of her experience with Jesus. How he touched her life. She was there at the crucifixion and she will share that experience with us as well. She also was one of the first to encounter the risen Christ. You won't want to miss her message.

Yes, we, too, are shedding tears. Most of the wonderful plans we had for this holy season have had to be changed but our faith and our desire to share this holy week with you has not changed.

Jesus did not do as the people gathered around him wanted him to do. But, what he did was even greater than they could ever have imagined. He did not save just Israel, he saved us all. This, my friends, is cause for celebration. So, let's set aside our disappointment and join our hearts in anticipation of what Jesus has done and continues to do for each one of us.