

Before we begin this message, I would like to share a bit of humor from Carol Barnes. We spoke the other day about how to maintain some light heartedness despite illness and the pandemic. She sent me a photograph of some baby chicks who were wearing decorative muffin tin papers around their middles. She told me that if anyone at Calvary would like to outfit some chicks, she has plenty of decorative muffin tin papers.

Palm Sunday. If circumstances were different, the service would start with the choir, worship assistants, pastors and the children walking up to the front of the sanctuary waving palm branches and singing. The congregation would also have palm branches and would wave them from where ever they happened to be sitting. We would be marking the start of Holy Week and culminating with the celebration of Easter. However, circumstances have drastically changed. We are worshipping on line. We are practicing social isolation. These events have changed some of our expectations about this Easter season. Make no mistake; the message of Christ's sacrifice for us is the same. Or is it? The texts for this morning have something in common. They reflect ways in which Jesus upended our expectations. It seems fitting that we take a look at three incidents that took place during the start of Holy Week and see how the messages are not what the crowds and the disciples had come to expect.

The first incident is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The residents and crowds had entered Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Passover. It was the celebration of the release of the Jews from slavery in Egypt after the 10 plagues. How fitting considering our present circumstances. Now, in their homeland, slavery of one form or another was familiar to these people. Jerusalem was ruled by Rome and controlled the population with an iron fist. Enslavement, heavy taxation and genocide were common ways Rome controlled the populace. Considering the harshness of life, it is not surprise that the reputation of Jesus would have drawn crowds with high expectations.

Jesus had established a reputation as a teacher, a prophet and maybe even the Messiah. Would he become the next king in the line of David? When Jesus enters the city, he instructs the disciples to procure a donkey that he will mount and ride

into the city. We all know that part of the story. His riding on a donkey is in direct contrast to the usual way a Roman ruler would enter the city after a successful conquest. That would have been with a horse drawn chariot. However, the way Jesus rode into the city was a sign of humility and peace. Peace, because he was not there to be another conqueror. So with high hopes for deliverance from oppressive Roman rule, the people willingly spread garments and palm branches on the road in front of Jesus. Hold onto this idea as it is part of Jesus' plan to change our expectations.

Now we skip ahead to Jesus' celebration of his last meal with his disciples. He proceeded to bend down and wash the disciples' feet. Remember that it was the custom in Jewish homes for a servant to wash guests' feet as they entered the home. It was a sign of hospitality, an important virtue among Jewish families. However, Jesus upends that tradition by assuming the role of servant, rather than the guest. A guest performing such a service like this would never have been dreamed of. He used it as a teaching moment. He asked them: "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me 'Teacher and Lord.' You are quite right to do so, for I am. If then I, the Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, so you ought to wash each other's feet, for I have given you an example, that, as I have done to you, you too should do to each other. This is the truth I tell you-the servant is not greater than his master, nor he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things you are blessed if you do them." In Jesus' nearness to God he was not separated from men and women, but brought people nearer to him.

The third incident in this series is the cleansing of the temple. Jesus became upset with the money changers and those who sold doves. Jesus became upset because the coins that were being sold to people to present as offerings were imprinted in images of idols. And the shopkeepers who sold doves to the poorer people had jacked their prices up. This would have made it difficult for the low income Jews to purchase a dove to offer as a sacrifice in the temple. He overturned the tables of the shopkeepers. Then he said; "my house is a house of prayer for the nations; you've turned it into a hangout for thieves."

In each of these three stories, Jesus overturns our expectation. He literally "turned the tables on our expectations." Jesus was by his example demonstrating three important lessons: the need for a servant's heart, the need for humility and

the need to wrap our heads around his desire to remain close to each and every one of us.

It strikes me that these lessons from Jesus are being lived out in response to covid19. A comment made on Friday by Martin Luther King III says this well. Friday was the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King's death. Martin Luther King III made this statement: "I believe that if he were alive today, he would be encouraging all of us, in order to defeat this virus, to work together in ways we have never done before." As we navigate these very difficult times, it has occurred to me and to many others that there are some very important changes in human behavior that have occurred in response to the covid19 pandemic.

We have seen all kinds of generosity at all levels of society that speak to our better natures. Just like the examples in Scripture, we see generosity, loving kindness and a willingness to go beyond our own interests to help others in need. It is not that we have neglected these traits in the past, but the amount and quality of kindness has been noticed at all levels of society and in our governing bodies. CEO's of companies have given up their salaries to help their employees. Companies have stepped up to manufacture personal protective equipment and ventilators in lieu of their usual products. Loans are being temporarily forgiven, taxes that are due are postponed. And we see all kinds of ways people have reached out to those in isolation even if they cannot visit them. Children have made pictures to give to shut ins. Folks in assisted living facilities and in private homes are sewing masks. Musicians and coral groups are performing without any audiences and the music is transmitted to those who are in isolation. It is these kinds of activities that remind me of the ways that we have set aside our usual pursuits to help others.

Eventually we will come out of this pandemic. What is of concern is that we may return to the old ways of working hard, being absorbed in the many details of getting our lives back to normal routines. In itself, that is necessary. But I hope we do not lose sight of the positive changes that have surfaced. Generosity, loving kindness and commitments to people in ways we had not done before. And I cannot fail to mention the reduction in polarization that has plagued us as a nation.

In last week's Courier Herald, Rich Elfers had a column where he discussed change in the time of Coronavirus. He ended with a quote from a man by the name of Roy T. Bennett. "It's only after you have stepped outside your comfort zone that you begin to change, grow and transform." This quote brings me right back to where we started: the ways Jesus upended our ways of thinking during his ministry, and particularly, during Holy Week. Jesus certainly knew what was ahead of him and I am sure he was not looking forward to the human end of his life. But despite this, he became even more of a servant than before. And it was his goal for people to see that he loved them and wanted to reduce the distance between God and the human beings he loved.