

## **Palm Sunday**

Isaiah 56:1-8

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Romans 14:11-19

John 12:12-16

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And so we begin one of the most important weeks of the church year. With Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem we are on the homestretch of Lent toward the beauty of Easter. In today's world, as people who choose to follow Christ, this week is both the question and answer for us. Who is Jesus? Or more precisely, who is Jesus in our lives?

The question of who Jesus is, is central to the entire New Testament. His was an identity that was questioned from the moment he was born. After all, who could imagine a king being born in a stable? It started long before that however, but we can easily relate to the Christmas story. When God sets out an offer of love, it is often met with rejection. When he spat on the eyes of a blind man, those who saw it became blind themselves. When he forgave the woman caught in adultery, they criticized his compassion. When Jesus turned tables in the marketplace and outed their unjust practices, they didn't even notice, because they were too busy collecting the scattered coins. Instead of seeing God incarnate, Herod saw that babe in the manger as a threat. And from that point onward every time love and power have intersected we are at Palm Sunday again.

As we journey through Holy Week, we see fragments of who God is; it's as if we can only touch only the hem of God's robe, or get a taste in the bread and wine, or for just a moment catch the whiff of the perfume that anointed. But we never understand completely. God is too big, too transcendent.

Theologian Marcus Borg describes Palm Sunday as one that identified Christ as a king, but not the kind who was expected. It's true that people had been waiting for a new ruler. Waiting for the one who would hear their cries and crush their oppressors. They hoped for one would come and turn the tables of power in their favor. But wait a minute, who is this? Everyday clothes? Riding on a measly animal? No sword? No soldiers flanking him? Not even a flowing robe and a ring?

Isn't this the King we hope for ourselves? Do we not in some way expect God to perform for us? To wield power and make everything alright while we watch? We expect God to fill our churches, to fix our problems, to protect our loved ones. The truth is we actually know very little about God. Perhaps we should just admit it. And if we get that far, perhaps this Holy Week we'd be better off to just

listen, watch and learn. God isn't here to meet our expectations; God wants to change them.

Our expectations are insatiable. We hope for more money, more comfort, more health, more security, more property, more education, more sports, more mind-altering experiences, more escape rooms and dining and technology – more *anything* that will help us either feel alive or that will numb the pain of it all. Sometimes we even demand that religion cater to our needs and easily walk away when we don't get the "spiritual" experience we wanted.

When I was younger, I wasn't looking for a spiritual experience never mind a king. As a fairly typical young person, I was far more interested in organizing my own life. There was no time for faith to interrupt my schedule or influence my perspectives. Obviously, something changed! A couple of years after I was ordained I was in touch with a long-lost friend from my junior high and high school days. When the inevitable question came up "What do you do?" I wasn't quite prepared for her reaction. We had been in the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry together – which I suppose didn't prepare her much for me to say that I was a priest! And so she laughed! A whole-hearted laugh at the incongruence of who she had known me to be. And I realized, just how much faith had changed (and is still changing) me.

If we think that undertaking a life of faith means a rubber stamp on the way we live, then we haven't begun to follow. Everything about Christ's life, every moment and especially the journey of Holy Week highlights this. In this speck of time we hear that Jesus came to love us in a way we never asked for or imagined. So foreign is Christ's way, that many laugh whole heartedly at its idea and then look for another.

In the first Century they cried: *He can't be a king, he's from Nazareth! Who does he think he is healing people on the Sabbath? What arrogance he has to think that he can forgive sin!* Today we continue the questioning as we ask: *"What difference could it make? Isn't faith for the weak? What would I need a king for anyway?"* Our thoughts expose our inability to understand a world view other than a human one.

And yet, don't we long for a different world? Certainly we long for *not* one more school shooting, *not* one more war, *not* one more nuclear threat, *not* one more incident of sexual abuse, *not* one more bully, *not* one more toxic lake, *not* one more bomb, *not* one more...

How do we get there? Listen, learn and watch Jesus. Walk alongside Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. Take note of where love is at a crossroads with your own way of life. Pay attention to the use of power – does it build or tear down? Kneel

at the feet of someone – *anyone* - and just serve instead of expecting service. Eat and drink the bread and wine like it's the first time, as if Jesus himself gave it to you. Roll the stone over all that steals life away from you, leave it behind and make room for God to resurrect something new. If we never take the chance to try to live differently we will not get very far on the way.

It used to be a catchy phrase to teach children: "WWJD!" What would Jesus do? But isn't that the idea of a life of faith for us all? We are invited off the sidelines of Palm Sunday into a new way of peace that the world still desperately needs.

Paul teaches in the letter to the Romans that "WWJD" is as simple as letting God be God. In Romans he speaks to the whole community saying what one eats and another doesn't isn't important at all. What is however, is the fact that God's love is open to all. Paul calls them to share responsibility for one another rather than to rank who is better than who.

In this way, God invites us to participate in the way of peace. To join in the work of justice, to learn what love really looks like, tastes like. Movements in our time like reconciliation with First Nations peoples, inclusion, alternative energy, reducing our consumption, justice for women and minorities, fair trade are a few examples where privilege and power meets justice and compassion. Take the road less traveled. Try the thing that challenges you, consider the choice that feels new, different, the one that challenges you to engage the world differently. Be generous so that you may trust God more. Be committed to your church, to one another as a family of God. Refuse to put yourself first. I'm not talking about huge, dramatic decisions, but rather small ones – because it starts with one person, you. Ask God "what would your Son want me to do?" Then do it.

Then we will be on the road with Jesus. Then we will walk alongside our neighbours. Then we will see real change in our communities. Then we will see the growth of the church. Then we will know a bit more about God.

Amen.