

Call to Worship

Mighty God, we wave our palms as the followers of Jesus did long ago, for we also long for deliverance.
We join the procession with a passionate hope, yet we follow at some distance not knowing what that deliverance may require of us.

As we worship this day, give us courage to walk the road to Jerusalem with Jesus, **...to face both the known and the unknown with faith in him who has gone before us to meet crisis and cross for our sake, giving thanks together, that whatever we may face in this world we do not face alone.**

Prayer of Invocation

Come among us again, in triumph, not with the trappings the world expects, but as the servant who set us an example of humility and hope. Astound us, not with garments of glory, but wearing the clothes of a worker like one of us. **Lead us – past the gates of acclamation through the dark night of Gethsemane and the cross and beyond, as we, your worshipping people, wave our branches of victory to proclaim to the world that you, the Blessed One, are come into our midst. Hosanna! Hallelujah!**

The Word Luke 19:28-40 Common English Bible

After Jesus said this, he continued on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. **He said, "Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.**

If someone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" **They replied, "Its master needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.**

As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. **They said, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens."**

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!" **He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."**

Living the Word Coming Home: Arrival and Reception The Children's Parade...

Today is Palm Sunday. It is the last week of Lent and the first day of Holy Week. Palm Sunday is about everything that has gone before today and everything that is yet to come.

Jesus has some idea of what is ahead. He knows this is the last trip into the city and that the entrance will go according to Hebrew scriptures. Zechariah foretold that the Messiah would come riding in on a donkey. But how it would all play out, could he have known? The disciples sure didn't know what was ahead. They were just going along with the crowd, according to Jesus instructions, as they acquired a donkey and prepared to enter the city.

Arrivals and receptions happen quickly, often even if they are planned ahead. As I flew home from my vacation, a couple of years ago on February first, I anticipated getting off the plane, walking to the escalator down to the baggage claim, and descending to someone I love, sister or brother to give me a hug, help me get my bag and walk with me chattering all the way out to parking where we would drive somewhere for a meal together and then back to New Richmond.

Instead, just before I arrived, I got a call from brother, Dan that he would meet me outside after I got my bag. He was parked outside the terminal waiting to swing in and pick me up. So I got my bag, called him that I would be watching for him. He swung in threw my bag in the back and informed me that we had better get going quickly straight home as the traffic and the snow were both picking up.

Arrival and reception, both happened very quickly and wasn't exactly what I expected, but I was just thankful for the ride and it was all just fine, especially because he had a cold Diet Coke waiting for me in the car. Still it wasn't quite how I thought it would go.

For the younger son in the prodigal story, he couldn't imagine how the father he had scorned would greet him. Remember, he had his speech all planned: "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." But the father greeted and celebrated a new beginning with him in ways beyond his imagining.

For the older son in the prodigal story, he was furious when he saw how the arrival and reception for his brother was playing out. Though now he had left his father through a freshly broken relationship, he would have to find his way home before he could experience and receive an arrival and reception of any sort.

So let's review, play by play, what Jesus' arrival and reception was like, after the procurement of the donkey, which went according to plan. All four of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell the story of the 'Triumphal Entry' of Jesus into Jerusalem, though each is told from a little different perspective. Today we are looking at Luke's perspective.

It begins with a happy parade of people throwing their cloaks down to honor Jesus as he rode by, children waving palm branches, and shouts of 'Hosanna.' I was well into my faith journey before I understood that the word 'Hosanna' meant 'save us.' I was then for years sure that these poor Hebrew people were desperately begging for help, their life and conditions so poor.

Truly their lives weren't easy and they lived under great oppression from the Roman government and from their own church leaders. But on this day – the Palm Sunday that we still celebrate with a parade today, they were shouting 'Hosanna' as a happy cry, because it indicated that these people recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the one who could save them.

It was a triumphal entry as they now believed that this man, 'Jesus' would save them, though they didn't know how that would happen. Some of them may have had a battle plan in their minds, but if they did, they were way off in the end. Verses 37 says this: "*As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all of the mighty things they had seen.*"

Note two things here – First, there were many more disciples than just the twelve. A throng is defined as a large number of people crowded together; Synonyms: a multitude, mass, crowd, horde, swarm or mob. The second thing is that they weren't being quiet, they were shouting, rejoicing, praising God. "*Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.*"

Then comes the first twist in the event: Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "*Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!*" The Pharisees were from the crowd. Why were they there and why would they try to stop this? Were they just not in the mood for a party? Or were they afraid for Jesus, that this might

come to a bad ending? Or were they afraid for themselves that this Jesus movement was getting out of hand and threatening their power with the people?

Whatever their motive, Jesus answered them: *"I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."* Jesus using hyperbole? Exaggerating for effect? Or is it no exaggeration? Surely the Son of God could have the rocks make noise. In fact, only a few days later God made the day turn to dark and an earth quake happened at the exact moment of the physical end of Jesus life.

This is the moment, now is the time, the beginning of the end. Jesus intends for these men, and us, to remember this moment as a realization of who he is and that he came to save all of humanity throughout time. In that moment he is offering salvation one more time to those who haven't yet been able to accept it before then. In that moment we are given another chance to recognize God's saving grace for ourselves. And then the moment is gone and they move on.

The sermon could end here, but I think we should go a little further to the end of Chapter 19. *"As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. He said, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. The time will come when your enemies will build fortifications around you, encircle you, and attack you from all sides. They will crush you completely, you and the people within you. They won't leave one stone on top of another within you, because you didn't recognize the time of your gracious visit from God.""*

Jesus wept because 'home' - Jerusalem, had changed... or possibly because it hadn't changed for the better. Jesus wept because humans have changed through time, or possibly because we haven't changed even though we claim to know Christ...Jesus didn't weep because God had changed; God continued to love all of us enough to let Jesus suffer and die.

Following this, Luke records that Jesus went to the Temple where *"he threw out those who were selling things there. He said to them, "It's written, My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a hideout for crooks.""* The market of that time was right outside the Temple and even in the entry way.

The words Jesus uses are not that they should not be selling there, but that they should not be underhanded merchants disguising their trade and hiding their schemes in the shelter of the house of prayer. Jesus preached about thievery and dishonesty as wrong anywhere, but it always seems even more evil when disguised as something good at the church.

The last verses of chapter 19 continues to build the tension in the air around wherever Jesus is: verse 47, 48: *"Jesus was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests, the legal experts, and the foremost leaders among the people were seeking to kill him. However, they couldn't find a way to do it because all the people were enthralled with what they heard."*

Knowing what lies ahead, Jesus continues his work. His arrival has stirred up a hornet's nest of chief priests, legal experts and the top leaders, all abuzz with plots to end his ministry. At the same time more and more people were joining the throng of disciples who heard and believed. Within their crowd were still the whispers of Hosanna, save us. Sides are being taken, and before the end of the week the shouts would turn from 'save us' to 'crucify him.'

Moment by moment, within a week of arrival and reception, how quickly things have changed. In the Bible all of this has happened in half of one chapter. Now the rest of the 'Holy Week' story gets clumped together and goes on quickly. During this time and in the days ahead, everything the people knew got twisted around. For some they went from believing - to a call for crucifixion. For others, faithful followers found themselves denying Christ and all that they thought they knew to be truth.

Arrivals and receptions happen quickly, often even if they have been planned for, it is the surprising elements that we remember most. Luke records these moments in this story :

- Clothes thrown on the ground before Jesus and the donkey
- The joy of the parade
- The harsh words of the Pharisees
- The hyperbole of Jesus saying the rocks would shout
- Jesus' tears over Jerusalem
- Jesus' anger in the Temple
- The threat building as Jesus keeps teaching

Do you think Jesus played these events over in his head as he hung on the cross? The disciples recorded these moments, each from their own perspective, and most of them weren't recorded until decades later, but I am sure in that oral culture they were shared, generation to generation as Christianity began to grow.

It is interesting how we can view all of these events through our 'history glasses.' Like the disciples in the years following the events, we can look back and see how it all became muddled in the last week in the minds of the people, disciples included. It is also pretty clear that Jesus was able to stay focused through it all; eye on the prize, heading toward the cross, but able to see even beyond that to a victorious win over death, through the resurrection.

What we have as we look back that they didn't recognize at the time is that Jesus was: 'peace on earth.' They still were proclaiming peace in heaven, but didn't believe it was possible here on earth. We can look at Christmas and hear the words foretold in Isaiah that the messiah would be the 'Prince of Peace.' But there was a price for that peace. Jesus knew that and we can see it now, too. We are able to look at these moments of Palm Sunday and see the 'Prince of Peace' riding on a donkey, slowly and humbly into the thick of the problem, with no intent of drawing a sword.

We now know it was a story of victory, truly a triumphal entry as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the royal city of his people, for this final time, he is the 'prince of peace' come to bring the people 'peace on earth.' Jesus is the key to the peace and love that we yearn for in this lifetime. It is the key that opens the door for our arrival and reception with God. Home is where the heart of God is.

If these stories sound impressive, what kind of stories will we have to tell as we remember our arrival and reception with God? On our spiritual journeys toward God have we experienced the Hosanna moments – Jesus save me? In those moments have we finally recognized Jesus as our Savior? On our physical journeys, can we even begin to imagine what our arrival will be like after this life? And the reception? Go ahead, dream big, then think greater...but know that God can and will think even greater!

Lots to ponder this week as Christ journeys to the cross...