

April 5, 2020 Portraits: Pt 5 Jesus: The King Who Comes
Luke 19:28-44

In keeping with the times through which we are living, I hope and I pray this message finds you and your loved ones well. Barbara and I are living indoors and practicing social distancing. It has been 3 weeks and we are both healthy. At the same time, let me say to my beloved people at St. Andrew's Stirling, I miss you. I miss the laughter and the affection that has been part of our assembling together. I miss the fellowship (I underline the Biblical fellowship we have shared) which has always included relaxed conversations, sharing in joys and sorrows, with a healthy dash of food, cake and ice cream, what the Gospels and Acts refer to as the breaking of bread together. And I have missed Sherry Mayhew's ministry of music, which of course includes what she accomplishes with our choir. Worship has been important to us and we all miss it in a time when we cannot gather. But we have always done more than just worship together. In the light of that worship we have spent time building relationships, and counting one another as family...the family of God. When I have spoken to any of you by phone there have been questions about John Mercer's death. There will be a time when we will share in grief and celebrate his life and his gifts while he was among us. But we will have to wait for another time to be able to do so. Please continue to pray for Linda, and her family. She and they have suffered through the inability to do what we normally take for granted when we lose a loved one. Let us turn to God's word.

April the 5th is Palm Sunday. Just a day ago Barbara said to me, "I guess I will have to wait another year to get new Palms." Just off from our kitchen there hangs a sketch of hands extended upwards. We bought it in Port Arthur when we were first married. It was a preliminary sketch by a local artist, preparing to do a major painting in oils of Jesus being crucified. That painting resembled the image of the raising of the American flag at Iwa Jima during World War II. Our sketch is of the hands raising that would be portrayed as raising the cross into place, Jesus fastened to it by the rough Roman nails. Every Palm Sunday, Barbara has brought home Palm leaves from St. Columba or St. Andrew's and placed them behind that picture, held in place above the frame. It was her acknowledgement that this is not going to be a "Normal" Holy Week. New palm leaves will have to wait for next year.

If I have a personal prayer for Barbara and I, I extend it to you and yours. May our inability to do the normal things, (Palm Sunday, Communion on Thursday evening, Good Friday service with the greater Church community in Stirling, and of course our resurrection celebration on Easter Sunday) underline for the balance of our lives, how important this season is to us, focusing on the Passion of the Christ to redeem us from our sin. We hold this treasure in our hearts and minds by faith...or we have nothing.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. It was an extraordinary moment in time. Jesus had consistently told the disciples, not just the 12, but that loyal crowd of 120

that followed HIM not to call HIM King. Not to speak of HIS being the Messiah. But on Palm Sunday Jesus reveals HIMSELF in dramatic fashion. He is on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He is near the Mount of Olives, a significantly high hill from which one can see the ruins of the Temple in the holy city. In Jesus time there were villages, Bethany and Bethphage, now part of the urban sprawl of neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. Here, Jesus sends two of the disciples to a specific home where there is a colt, that has never been ridden. Jesus instructs them to untie it and bring it to HIM. If they are questioned they are to answer, “the Lord needs it.”

That leads us to consider at least two things. Apparently the owner of the colt has not only heard of Jesus, but will recognize these disciples. It leads us to assume that this household has been formerly touched by the ministry of Jesus in a richly personal way. Was a member of the family healed? Were they present at one of the miracle stories? Clearly there is a bond between the owner of the colt and Jesus, a relationship, perhaps even a measure of faith. And the details unfold almost exactly as Jesus has foreseen. They are questioned. “Hey there, what are you doing?” “The Lord needs it.” Permission is given. So it comes to pass, that Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on the back of the colt, to the cheers of adoring crowds. Jerusalem is full of pilgrims (Jewish) who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They have heard stories about Jesus: the wisdom of his teaching, the marvels of healing and cleansing, HE is greeted at the gates of the city like a rock star. And they are remembering the words of the

prophet Zechariah, “Rejoice greatly O Daughter of Zion! Shout Daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

We, the participants in the Christian movement lose sight of something very important. It is not the case that the disciples and Church Scholars sat down after the dust had settled, and combed the Old Testament looking for references that might enforce or undergird the claims of the Gospels and the New Testament letters. There was an existing part of the Jewish tradition and Jewish scholarship that yearned for and looked for the coming of the their Messiah. The Jewish traditions defined the Old Testament texts like Isaiah 53 as an addressing of the fact that God had promised to send a Saviour. It is those texts defined by Judaism, part of the work of the teachers and scholars of the Law and the Prophets, to which we turn as we look in the Old Testament for portions which speak of what happened in Jesus life and ministry centuries before the time of Jesus.

The pilgrims who flowed into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, in the time of Moses, were very religious and very informed when it came to the teaching of the Law and the prophets. They recognized on what we call Palm Sunday that the words of Zechariah were literally being acted out before their eyes in their time. And they rejoiced! And they shouted! What Luke tells us is that the whole crowd of Jesus disciples, (all of them looked upon themselves as Jews!) began

shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." And by the way, that is a Messianic verse from Psalm 118. All the Pilgrims new the words and they took up the cry.

Such is the moment in which Jesus is revealed to be the one who as HE said, must come to Jerusalem, be rejected, die at the hands of the powers that were egged on by Jewish religious leadership (The Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem led by the High Priest), die to save, and rise on the 3rd day. One week later! The crowd of disciples and the more numerous crowd of Jewish Pilgrims are having the party of a lifetime. The expectation is that something glorious is about to occur. And we miss something if we reduce the crucifixion of Jesus to some mere dramatic tragedy. Each of the Gospel writers makes it very clear that the will of God strong to save was what was working out in the details of the week in which Jesus was betrayed, tried and executed. And it is a fact of history that Jesus rose from the dead the following Sunday morning. Some will say that is just my opinion. Not so. I will never claim that the Church is a perfect institution. Never. But these are the facts.

In the New Testament era, Jesus influenced 12 lives and one of them betrayed HIM. When the resurrection occurred and was proven to have happened there were 120 who gathered in the upper room. (Luke 24:33, John 20:19-20, Mark 16:14,) Today the influence of Jesus can only be counted by the millions. Lives touched and changed by Jesus are to be found among every race on earth and in most if not all nations.

It is a matter of the sin of pride that people deny this fact as significant. When people die, their influence in this world comes to an end. Jesus is alive. He rose. He saves. He changes lives. The power of the Kingdom of God, and of the King of Kings is not the Church, or vested in clergy like myself or my daughter. We are at best servants of the King. At worst we are merely human beings. Jesus Christ is Lord. And it was on Palm Sunday close to 2000 years ago, HE was revealed to the world as Christ the King. And even some Roman soldiers gasped... (a centurion is mentioned, the officer in charge) "Surely HE was the Son of God."(Matthew 27:54) "All hail King Jesus!"(A chorus by Dave Moody)

And yes there were some clergy present who suggested Jesus should not let those who were rejoicing and shouting do so. What Jesus said was, "If they were silent, the stones would take up the cry. "All hail, King Jesus!"

Let us pray;

Lord YOU are the KING of Kings. YOU are our sovereign Lord. YOU are the ONE to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance, and therefore we must serve any and all who need us. Grant that we might be strong to serve, neighbours, friends, family, and strangers who cross our paths to the glory of YOUR name.

Lord we pray for Canada and all her people in the time of this Covid-19 plague. We pray that we might be good examples of social distancing, and that we might be instruments of mercy where and when we have the

opportunity to share an encouraging word, or food to the hungry, or service to those who are sick.

We pray for the doctors and nurses and other hospital staff, and first responders who minister and seek to save the lives of those who have been stricken ill. Keep them safe that they may continue to serve. Heal their patients that they might be returned to their families.

Lead us one and all through this valley to better times, in which we may glorify your name with brothers and sisters in the faith. Amen