



“At a Distance” ~ Palm Sunday 2020 ~ “Takin’ It to the Streets”

Good Morning Saints and welcome back to our “At a Distance” reflection series here at All Saints Episcopal Church in Vancouver, Washington. Today we are celebrating Palm Sunday, where we remember and participate again, in Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Today is also the beginning of Holy Week and Christians throughout the World are remembering, centering, praying and in some cases re-living Jesus’ week of challenge and miracle. Mona and I had the privilege to be in Spain, two years ago for Samana Santa, Holy Week. The parades, processions and public pageantry were truly amazing. Entire villages and sometimes cities coming out to the small and winding urban ways to remember and celebrate Jesus’ Journey to the Cross.

Today, at All Saints and in our homes, we are gathering together to remember how it all started that fateful week... with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But first, a bit of a programming note about what you will not see and hear today.

Traditionally, Palm Sunday is the day that the “Passion of Jesus” is read or some times theatrically recounted in many Christian churches across the land. Congregations follow along and ring out, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him” as we course our way through Jesus’ abduction, trial, crucifixion and burial as is written in Matthew 27: 11-54. But, in my view, this re-telling of the Passion of Jesus on today, Palm Sunday... Parade Day if you will, is a bit liturgically “out of place.” This reading is much more suited to our liturgical frame of mind and spirit on Good Friday, and that is when I encourage you to join me in reading it.

So, what are we about today on this Palm Sunday? Well, Blessed Ones, we are all about Jesus doing what almost all the great social, moral and theological revolutionaries have always done... “Takin’ It To the Street.” Just like the great Doobie Brothers song from the late ’70’s by “Takin’ it

to the Streets,” Jesus showed all the Social Action Hall of Famers how to do it right. The abolitionist leaders of the Civil War era, the Suffragettes, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Malcom X, The Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, our LBGTQ community and so many more. Jesus putting it all on the line, even unto His death on the Cross for what he believed, what He “knew” to be true and what Jesus committed to during his Vision Quest in the Desert, now just three short years before. Bringing about a radical change to how John the Baptist and Jesus and His disciples, and others saw Judaism changing and playing out in the first century. Let’s take a few steps back and see how we got to where we are today; Jesus and his disciples igniting a large, visible march into the stronghold of his staunchest enemies: The Romans, The Temple High Priest, The Chief Priests, the Sanhedrin Council and his theological antitheses, The Saducees.

Jesus had spent almost all of His public ministry in Galilee, seen as an academic and intellectual back-water by those at the top of the 1st Century religious, intellectual and social, Jerusalem-centric Judean world. The vast majority of Jesus’ followers were typical of the Galileans of the times... poor, simple, plain people. Most could not read or write, speaking Aramaic like the “country people” that they were. Galileans as a whole were looked down upon by the more urbane, socially sophisticated and learned population of Judea and especially the upper class residents of Jerusalem. Jesus was viewed by many in the upper social and religious strata of Jerusalem as an itinerant country-bumpkin type preacher, a student and side-kick of John the Baptist. Both John the Baptist and Jesus were seen as a type of “apocalyptic prophet who believed God would intervene in history to overthrow the forces of evil and set up a utopian kingdom on earth. “This apocalypse was to be initiated by a shadowy ,Old Testament divine figure called The Son of Man, and this utopian kingdom on earth would be ruled over on earth by the Jewish Messiah / the Anointed One. This dramatic social and religious upheaval was believed to be imminent by John and Jesus and Jesus’ own disciples.

In fact, it could happen any day... definitely within Jesus’ own generation. This apocalyptic time was right now. So in Jesus’ apocalyptic world view, who were these “forces of evil” that would be overthrown? Well, it reads like a “Who’s Who” in the upper social strata in first Century Jerusalem.

First and foremost, the Romans who forcibly occupied the Jewish Lands. Next, it was the Religious Elite of the day, the Temple Cult, who Jesus and others saw as not executing the Torah correctly and thereby disrespecting the Temple specifically and Judaism as a whole. Firmly in Jesus' sights after the Romans, was the High Priest himself, the Chief Priests, the Sanhedrin Council and the entire Sadducee religious, social and academic leadership. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem to finally get them all to pay attention to what He has been saying for the last three years in Galilee. Coming in from the frontier to look them all in the eye and say what has been on his mind for a very long time. And for Jesus' longevity, the timing couldn't have been worse.

Passover in Jerusalem was an absolute madhouse. Everyone scrambling to make preparations for the huge celebration with family and friends. Visitors streaming into the city in huge numbers, and often anti-Roman groups used this time to incite the swollen and agitated population of Jerusalem into protests and demonstrations of various kinds. The job of the Romans in this time and place was simply to keep the peace. At any cost, and by any means. That is why Pilate had journeyed from his usual coastal residence to be in Jerusalem to lead the Roman contingent in person and to ensure social and political order was maintained at any cost.

And here, now on this day, we have Jesus a few miles away from Jerusalem in Bethany, having walked a full week on foot to come to Jerusalem from Galilee. To make his point, to stake out his ethical and moral high ground. No matter what the cost personally to himself. To live fully into the call of his Vision Quest in the Desert and his Baptism by the river. To deliver his message of social justice and equality and peace and humility in both life and in prayer... and most of all his message of love. He would deliver this message in many ways in the next several days as we will soon learn. With ferocity and gentleness. Jesus will poke a very large stick into a very large nest of hornets, dismantling the Temple and calling out the Temple leadership for their sinfulness and hypocrisy. Jesus will sit quietly with his friends and give birth to our blessed Sacrament of the Table. Jesus will stand before his accusers, both Roman and Jew without fear and with a quiet confidence.

And so now this morning Jesus simply calls his disciples to “get the colt” from the owner nearby. Word has gone forward like a wind-buffed fire that this prophet from Galilee... of whom they have heard much is coming... coming into Jerusalem. And they are all gathering to meet and greet him. Who? The beggars, the lepers, the sick, the women, the curious and wondering. A few in the Council send representatives to have a look. All is ready. Jesus is ready. Fearlessly, Jesus mounts the colt, fulfills the prophesy of earlier times and begins his reckoning with His destiny, His Vision, His quest. The rag-tag crowd takes palm fronds from the surrounding trees and from off of the ground. Shouts of Hosanna! Hosanna! The salute is for a King... recognition from the least and the lost of Jesus’ true role; not the itinerant, backwoods preacher and prophet from the backwaters of Galilee but someone much, much more... Messiah...The Anointed One.

And so it begins... Jesus, carpenter’s son... “Takin’ It To The Streets.”

Blessings to all,

Father Joe