April 5th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Palm Sunday

10:30am

Wilderness of Coronavirus – Virtual Church – Week Three

A Grand Welcome

1. Imagining the Scene

When I read this passage, I try to imagine the Palm Sunday scene. There is some irony in the fact that palms are not mentioned in the passage, but we definitely understand that this is a celebratory time. It is one where Jesus does not parade in with the grandest of animals, but a colt. There’s also some mystery around how Jesus knows where this colt is and how and why he asked his disciples to go and retrieve the donkey.

As Jesus waits for his disciples, I wonder if he reflects upon his ministry thus far as we do this morning. We’ve heard the stories of great miracles, of renewed hopes, of relationships built that could never have been conceived before. We’ve heard of people coming back to life, of being born again in the waters of baptism, of fisherman learning about what it means to fish for people.

For the people on the road - this moment is a culminating moment, a moment where we all come together, where the people at the parade gather to recognize the truth: Jesus Christ is King. All laud, glory, and honor are deserving of this man who is also deity.

And so the crowd gathers and they lay down their very best – their cloaks and scarves and palms and branches, making a path for the King to enter Jerusalem. It’s like they finally had the realization wash over them, as Jesus rides upon the donkey – they yell out ‘Hosanna’ or ‘Blessed be the name of the King!’ People from different backgrounds, different groups who would have otherwise never come together, stand side by side, acknowledging the King that they have come to know by his actions and by the love with people.

We see in this moment that harmony of creation, just even if it is for a moment of praise. We see that people who come from different backgrounds are better united than divided. We come to see that the works of Christ break down the barriers and walls of status and class. We see the image of God, the image of who we are called to be – a united people, praising this uniting King.

II. The realities we acknowledge

It’s a beautiful and stunning vision – a vision we long to live into – and yet we also acknowledge that that is not the reality this Sunday morning. As I look at the sanctuary doors, I remember clearly the choir walking in, with shouts of hosanna and singing, waving palm branches. I recall smiling at such a sight, with a smile offering palms to others, as we together reenacted this scene from centuries before. We stood side by side in the pews, no matter our background, and waved the fronds from the story. We may have not seen Jesus on a donkey come down our literal aisle, but the Spirit of this movement, the very breath of wind that the palms make reminded us clearly that the Spirit was here and moving in the space.

It’s hard, because as we celebrate Palm Sunday this morning - that is not the sight we have before us. And while we do not want to dwell in sadness, we need to recognize this important moment that we are missing. So how do we, in our time, in our own spaces, reengage this story as we cannot gather physically together?

Maybe there isn’t a sight as powerful, but maybe gathering here and being in community online and remembering will bring us to that important space. If you want to shout a loud ‘Hosanna’ – you can do that on or off mute. Nothing in this world gets to take this moment away from us, we still get to celebrate this culminating experience of joy, wonder, and renewal. We remember that throughout the ages, that even though we know the story and the words to come, we can suspend ourselves in this very moment: this moment to acknowledge that Christ is King.

So we lay down our most beloved things – not only the palms, the cloaks, but our very finest at Jesus’ feet. We lay down our hearts, our minds, our first impressions, our grand longings, our dreams, our fears, our vulnerabilities and fragilities – we lay down a path for Christ to enter in, to enter into our soul. We lay it on the ground, we surrender ourselves, for our King has come.

We look not across the pew, but across the world, we know that many people from many different backgrounds are having similar mornings. If not online, if together, remembering this holy time of celebration hosannas. We acknowledge that today we do stand alongside people with palms, maybe not physically, but with people who we would not necessarily agree with, people whose views would challenge our own, people who would not like us, people of different ethnicities, sexualities, nationalities, and more. We vulnerably stand in spirit alongside others unlike us, and we lay down our truth, our heart, the very best of ourselves in submission and sacrifice to Christ the King.

IV. From Palms to Passion

This Sunday is one where we at Springfield usually celebrate Palm Sunday and move into the realities of the liturgy of the passion. This is a Sunday that is often filled with paradox. Yet this year, I didn’t have the heart to bring you to the passion quite yet, for this Lenten wilderness is real and tangible enough. This morning, I decided to call you to the celebration.

Yet as we gather again virtually on Thursday, the road will change. The ones who loudly shouted the hosannas will be the same whose tone changes to a difficult ‘crucify him.’ The road of branches and cloaks will become worn with the marks of a rugged cross on the dirt. The celebration will end, for a time, as we acknowledge what redemption really costs. We will light the candles, we will extinguish them, we will cry, for none of us want this painful death, but know the reality.

And yet, even as we gather on Thursday night, struggling to irk the words out, to say the words that are so difficult to say, to remember step by step the story of the passion – we know the story. Our Easter morning here will look different, but it will probably look like what the first Easter looked like. It will be somber, but celebratory, it will start out as a secret and then leap into joy. Indeed, it will be different – but maybe rather than stand in the sadness of solitary worship, we have the unusual and blessed opportunity to find new meaning in this Easter. Perhaps Easter will change us this year more than ever before, and while we might not like the reasons why, perhaps our faith will be forever changed and forever strengthened as we come together on that resurrection day.

V. Palms

This week, I want you to step day by day into the readings that will bring us to that resurrection day. I want you to reflect upon what it means to lay down your very best as Christ laid down his life. I want you to know that despite screens, we still stand united in spirit. For this is why Christ came, to love in words beyond expression and grant us redemption greater than our own understanding. Amen.