**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**April 10th, 2022**

**When the Celebration Fades**

**Lent VI – Palms & Passion**

1. Polarity

This morning, we find ourselves in a unique polarity – the scene

of celebration and the agonizing act of crucifixion. We experience the great highs and great lows of faith within the course of one hour.

But this morning, we have begun with celebration – with the acknowledgment that people are understanding that the Messiah has come. He hasn’t come in on a Clydesdale horse with a crown upon his head and a scepter in his hand. No, in fact, he comes into the crowd on a colt, a small horse no more than four years old, and the road is one filled with palms and of coats and of anything that the public has, thrown on the road as a pathway for the Savior.

To us, it might be an odd sight, simply because of our context. We are used to the glamor of the Emmys and red carpets and Hollywood Stars. We anticipate the tabloids and the swooning that a fan makes when they see their favorite actor or actress. We find this strangely normal, expected – that’s how you treat someone of great importance.

But aren’t the palm and coats flung on the crowd like a red carpet? The people are so loud that they are not simply speaking, they are shouting. They are yelling, ‘Hosanna’ which as we have heard, means ‘Save Us!’ You couldn’t control this crowd even if you tried.

So when some of the Pharisees ask Jesus to make them stop, he acknowledges the impossible – how, how would he make them stop? He says that even if these people are quiet, the stones would shout aloud.

1. The Stones Shout

I love that line: If we were to stay silent, even the stones would shout aloud. The fact is – you cannot escape this good news. You cannot be quiet. There’s something beautifully liberating and empowering about this reality. A commentator, Rev. Detar Birt wrote about this scene when she says, “What they’re feeling is too important, the kind of thing that just has to come out regardless of whether or not it makes others uncomfortable. The discomfort of others is often not enough of a reason to keep the silence.”

It leads me to this question for us this morning, as we think about all that has unfolded this Lent and as we step into Holy Week, what is it that can’t stay silent anymore? What must be said? What are the questions of faith, apologies, issues of justice, truth-telling that we need to do?

Maybe Holy Week is just the right place to do that work – the work of saying what we need to say. Despite my native Jersian sensibilities, I still find it hard to name what needs to be named sometimes. I also grew up in a proper Presbyterian family – there would be no talk of politics or religion at the dinner table and you would not say anything off-putting or make anyone uncomfortable because that is not what a good Presbyterian does. We are a denomination that is affectionately (and sometimes not so affectionately) called the ‘frozen chosen’ – and sometimes that inhibits us from saying what we are called to say.

So, I ask you to shake off the ice, that frozen chosen-ness and seek this week to say the difficult and challenging things. This is the time. May you be like one of those in Jerusalem who just can’t stay quiet anymore but you have to make noise, because the good news is just too good to keep to yourself.

1. The shift

I would prefer to leave the sermon there. I would love to not

have to face the pain of our second reading, because who wants to enter that darkness. Yet, I have to – because if we do not talk about it, it makes Easter dull. Easter is this great jubilation and to feel it, you have to go to the dark to know what it feels like to understand the light of Easter morning.

We see the people in power creating havoc that we knew was coming – they can’t have anyone more powerful than them in the spotlight, they can’t lose their sense of self. While I don’t want to align myself with Pilate, you can hear the quiver in his voice – this man, Jesus, has done nothing wrong, choose someone else. Yet the powers keep on closing in and he ultimately succumbs to peer pressure. I think, whether or not we like to admit it, in some small ways, we in our lives have the tendency to give into peer pressure and the cultural norms, rather than rise against it and yell out like the crowd in Jerusalem. I don’t like that Pilate chose to go ahead, but I understand that his head would have been taken next and he sought to save himself. Who can’t relate to that very real human emotion.

So the powers that be not only let it happen, but drive Jesus to the cross. Jesus’ followers are wailing, they are trying to stop it, but the powers cannot fail. The powers mock him, berate him, challenge him, and make this already gory scene into one that is worse.

The yelling and hosannas have quieted, the earth has seemingly been quieted and the daylight fades. The curtain is torn in two. The world in its chaos feels like it’s going to end. God is on a cross.

The powers that be have killed our God. Yet, truthfully, we can’t know that if we were put in the same time and context that we wouldn’t be part of that powerful brood. Whether we would be shouting “hosanna” or “crucify him” is hard to know – we want to think the best of ourselves, but we need to remain open to the fact that we don’t know where we would have stood in that crowd. That, my friends, is humbling.

1. Holy Week

The challenge of Holy Week is living in these polarities – the joy

and the mourning, the hosannas and the calls for crucifixion, the powerful and the commoner. This week, it will feel dark, like there is a darkness that will never end, that is very insurmountable. This week, we feel the weight of our Savior on a cross – where the wrong people are in power and our God is dead. This week, we say the things we need to say aloud, because there’s no time like the present. This week, we usher in the feeling that nothing will be the same.

As your pastor, I wish I could take away that feeling for you, in some regard – I don’t want you to have to feel this darkness, this unsettling. On the other hand, I know that, again, for Easter to mean what it needs to mean…this is the place we all need to be. I leave you in this sermon with no resolution, no closure, no questions, and no sense of comfort. I leave you with the truth, that right here and right now, our God has taken his last breath and we hold ours knowing a better day will come. Amen.