

Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024

Let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Saviour. Amen.

Have you ever met someone who is just terrible? Most people aren't terrible, but every once in a while, you meet someone who is just awful to be around.

Several years ago, I was holding a bible study in an assisted living facility. And there was a man there, I'll call him Mel. Mel was rude to the care teams. He would order pizza and eat it and then leave the front desk to pay for it. He would criticize people personally, criticize the food. He was always getting into fights. He would fight with his son loudly on the weekends. He was just – so difficult.

Mel came to bible study every month. And he would just sit in the corner and not say anything. The care aids would say, "Why do you let that guy come? He's terrible." The front desk would say "You know, you can ask him to leave." The nurses would say "Are you seriously bringing Mel??!!!" And I would say "He never misses bible study. He doesn't even talk. I'm not kicking him out."

As he got older, Mel began to mellow out a little bit and he started to think about his life. He became slightly less insulting, less abrasive. And he never missed bible study – but he never said anything. Until one day, Mel spoke up- he said, *"Without Jesus, I wouldn't have a hope in hell."*

As he drew nearer to the end of his life, Mel began to think about the people he had hurt, and the mistakes he had made. Perhaps he was thinking about everything that he had been through that had caused him to be so angry and bitter. I don't know. But Mel listened to the stories of Jesus and knew that he absolutely needed forgiveness, mercy, help. Mel needed to be saved and he knew it. And for Mel, Jesus was his saving grace.

In the gospel story today, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. This is the beginning of what we call Holy Week, the time that we recall Jesus' last week before he dies and rises again at Easter. Here at McClure, on Thursday night- we will commemorate Jesus' last supper with his friends, and meditate upon his death on the cross. But before that, we have the Palm Gospel that we heard this morning.

There are all these people praising Jesus, cheering for him, honouring him. They are putting their coats on the road for Jesus to walk on. They are waving branches and leaves to show their support and devotion. These are not the people who will kill Jesus on Friday. These are not the priests from the temple. They're not politicians, kings, or dignitaries. So, who are they?

Let's imagine together who they might be. There was Zacchaeus the tax collector – he was taking too much from the people, had made mistakes, Jesus reached out to him and visited his house. There were the people with leprosy. There were the little children- that were being pushed away, and Jesus asked them to come closer. There was the woman with all the husbands. There were the sisters who lost their brother Lazarus, and Jesus raised him up. There were hungry people Jesus had provided food for. There were people with bad spirits torturing them -who Jesus set free. When we imagine those who would honour and believe in Jesus, we remember today that they were the ones Jesus welcomed when they had nowhere to go. People he cured from disease and blindness, people

who needed forgiveness or another chance. The people he treated as human when society had cast them away. People like Mel, who without Jesus, didn't have any hope at all.

The Palm Procession today, is a parade of people who needed to be saved. In this gospel, they are calling out, over and over, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" Hosanna means something like save us, rescue us, help us. Today we remember, that the first and strongest and some of the most devoted believers in Jesus, were the people *who most needed saving*. The people who most needed a saviour. The God of Israel has always been about saving people.

The celebration of Passover that Jesus has traveled to Jerusalem to participate in is a holiday when the Jews remember, how God had made the angel of death *pass over* their homes, when they were enslaved in Egypt. *Saving* their children. A holiday to honour God for saving them from slavery in Egypt. And so – today, with the crowds of those who loved him and knew him, we too honour God in Christ as one who saves.

This morning, we may not be sitting right at rock bottom like Mel was- knowing that he needed serious help right away. We may not be completely cut off from community like a person living with a communicable disease may be, but those people who are, and those crowds who gathered around Jesus, can teach us something about how to receive God. They can teach us something about welcoming Jesus into our lives. And that is – to acknowledge that we need God. Whoever we are, no matter how high or low, we all need to be saved from something. Maybe it's pride, or anxiety. Maybe it's poverty or sickness. We all need help with something. Most of us don't want to admit our own faults and needs and sorrows- we think it makes us weak, vulnerable. **Because it does make us vulnerable.**

But so many of Jesus first followers- were vulnerable in some way, susceptible to ridicule or physical danger, humbled - asking for help, admitting they needed God.

Brene Brown is a very famous researcher and social worker who has studied vulnerability. She has listened to hundreds of stories about times in people's lives when they were brought to their knees through loss or sickness, poverty, or abuse. And she has researched how facing our vulnerabilities can change us, and the course of our lives. How, if we are willing to accept our vulnerability, and our personal stories, it can lead to courage. She would say even that no act of courage can happen without vulnerability or being scared. In her book, *Daring Greatly*, she writes, "*Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.*"

This Palm Sunday, in order to join the procession of those who truly love Jesus, we have to do more than wave palms and talk about donkeys. We have to stand side by side with the crowds of people who most need saving, who cry Hosanna, with the sick, and those who need forgiveness. And we must acknowledge our own need for saving, our own vulnerability, our own need for God. Then we join in the song, and can welcome Jesus as our saviour. We can welcome God's forgiveness, love, and joy, and hope for the future into our hearts and into our lives.
Amen.

Rev. Emily Carr