

Holding on; Letting Go

Menno Mennonite Church

April 10, 2022

Purpose: To celebrate the triumphal entry as the inauguration of a new way of being as followers of Christ.

Message: As we allow ourselves to travel with Jesus even into the depths of despair, we are reminded that even there he, and we are not, shall not be abandoned by God.

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40 (I will read); Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 [please read]

Synopsis: Our expectations are powerful. We all have them—the notions of the way life and living SHOULD be, the way power should flow, the way our histories should work out. Often we find ourselves doing heavy lifting emotionally when we have to adapt our expectations to the reality of our life and times. We can feel abandoned by God when our world turns upside down.

Yet, God reminds us in the way of Christ on the way to the Cross that there is no place that we can be that God is not. We would much rather stay with the cheering crowds and never head toward Friday, toward the challenging of our expectations of a triumphant Christ. Yet, God in faithfulness reminds us that even when our expectations fail us, God does not, but can bring all things into full flower in time.

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

(Mt 21:1–11; Mk 11:1–11; Jn 12:12–19)

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸ After he had said this,
he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany,
at the place called the Mount of Olives,
he sent two of the disciples,
³⁰ saying,

“Go into the village ahead of you,
and as you enter it you will find tied there
a colt that has never been ridden.
Untie it and bring it here.

³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’
just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ”

³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.

³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them,
“Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They said, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus;
and after throwing their cloaks on the colt,
they set Jesus on it.

³⁶ As he rode along,
people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down
from the Mount of Olives,
the whole multitude of the
disciples began to praise God joyfully
with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,
³⁸ saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him,
“Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

In some ways by the time we reach the point of Palm Sunday, we know that it is over. We have passed again through the time of Lent, of preparing and anticipation and doing without. It is a time of introspection that is meant to invite us into the journey toward Jerusalem. But now it feels like it is over. The entry is here, the celebration of Christ the King and the coming of all that means. It can be easy from this vantage point to go from holiday to holiday, missing what is in between, even turning to the celebrations of what comes after as the world is re-engaged following lent.

My favorite is Dyngus Day. I should start by saying that I am not making this up, no matter how crackers this sounds. A celebration native to Poland and is followed by polish immigrants in many areas of this country, including Buffalo and South Bend where I have witnessed it, Dyngus day happens on the first Monday following Easter when the constrictions of lent are lifted and involves what else but quantities of water, broken crockery, sausage, and, of course, romance. The sausage is there to be eaten after the vegetarian fast of Easter. But this is not the central event of Dyngus day. It is the romance. By tradition, boys to be encouraged to express their affection for the woman of their fancy by dousing them with water by what ever means necessary. The point is to express you admiration for those around you with water, or occasionally cologne, “sprinkling” the apple of you eye with a douse of water, squirt gun, or a five gallon bucket—what ever is handy. All in the name of flirting

Now least we think this is solely a one sided and brutal occasion, let it be known that the women that are given the more dangerous elements of expression. Women are invited to return the favors bestowed on Dyngus Day on the following day, by throwing dishes or crockery back at the boys who have wetted them. After all nothing says “I care for you—let’s be friends” like a gravy boat sailing toward one’s person. While this holiday is supposed to be of medieval origin, celebrating the baptism of a member of the Polish royal family, it has now evolved into something of less religious import, and into more of general celebration of the end of something else. I smell a new Mennonite holiday in here somewhere. What better way to cast off our awkwardness in talking to the opposite sex than throwing some stoneware?

We are ready to get here already—on to Easter, on to that which comes after. Even our fairly nominal easter fast is ready to be broken. Life is springing every where it can find and outlet. How we would like to jump from here to there and not contemplate what comes between, to go from celebration to celebration without stepping into the hard place of knowing the

darkness between. We would much rather Jesus would skip right from triumph to triumph without ever having to contemplate the cross, to consider the cost and the pain. The coming of the Son of God to Jerusalem, the place of rejection and conflict, a hero riding toward destruction and desolation. We stand aside, knowing what is about to happen, and sing “ride on ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp, ride on to die.” Was a more incongruous line ever composed? What does majesty have to do with the call to die? Why do we celebrate this time, when the fulfillment has not yet been reached, when we know the horror that is about to happen?

Luke’s account of this procession into Jerusalem proposes some possibilities of how to hold the balance of hope and the need for the darkness in tension. First, it should be noted that within Luke’s account, the entry into Jerusalem is not necessarily part of the narrative of the passion. Entering the city, Jesus stays there and does many acts, has many teachings, indeed has days on end prior to the conflict of the passion.

This casts the coming in a different light. Here is a king coming; for Luke there can be no doubt. If you have the time, read the first half of Chapter 19 this week and see how the notion of royalty is entertained and explained, leading right into this unmistakable symbol of the coming King. The mode may not be the king we want, but rather the king we need.

Jesus sets to work. He goes about cleansing the temple, questioning the ruling elite, and distinguishing between that of God and that of Caesar. In short, the triumphant entry is a heralding of what is to come and a completion of the mission that Jesus sets out for himself in chapter 4 of Luke’s Gospel; he is declaring release for the captive, preaching good news for the poor and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor as he rides into the city of God.

Jesus began his ministry claiming identity as the one who is spoken of in Isaiah, and he is beginning his culminating act by taking on that identity again; the identity of the suffering servant. Jesus knows what awaits him. Jesus knows where this conflict was going to lead. In the midst of his disciples singing his praises, he weeps for the city which fails to see those things that make for peace, the ways of God, the ways of obedience. Jesus’ identity is now the one who offers himself not as a king, not as ruler, but as one whose obedience will place him as one to be ridiculed, tortured, and eventually murdered. The things of peace are not the things of the world and the Prince of Peace bears them even in the face of death.

As such, Palm Sunday is not so much a celebration as much as a re enactment. We know that this king will not be the one that was looked for; often will not be the one we look for. Try

as we might, Jesus will always confound our efforts to fit the role that we would have him wear—the one that is full and demanding and vengeful, and carries the agenda that happens to look identical to our own.

But that is never what we get. God’s mission, God’s will was being accomplished, not in the flaming entry of one who would rule, but in the humble obedience of one who had come to empty himself and become that which was promised from the first and for all time. Daniel Clendenin writes in *The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself*. “In Palm Sunday Jesus invites us to join his subversive counter-procession into all the world. But he calls us not to just any subversion, subversion for its own sake, or to some new and improved political agenda. Rather, Christian subversion takes as its model Jesus himself 'who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.’”

As we follow Jesus, we are called to this way of being in the world. Of taking on this appearance of God. We lay aside our agenda, our bones that we would love to pick not because we are not to think for ourselves, but we are to first think with the mind and heart of Christ who above all else sees and knows our very hearts.

In Palm Sunday, we celebrate not the lavish entry of a king from the first, beginning a rule for the ages, but rather the beginning of the end, the beginning superseding of that of Rome which held people bound, that of the law that separates one from the other, that of judgment that accuses each one, of vengeance that causes us to fester in strife. We are called to walk with Jesus and to be part of the subversive Gospel that holds nothing as impossible, not path too dark, to conflict as too intractable, no injury as incurable, no situation as vacant from the love of God. The strength of the faithful one described in Isaiah is the strength of YHWH, the strength not of power, but of service, hope, presence, and possibility in every situation for every time and every place.

The festival of the palms calls us not to abandon the challenges of Lent for the celebratory notes that are to come, but to walk with Jesus, to be part of Jesus’ subversive agenda in encountering the powers and principalities. Jesus was obedient, emptying himself for the journey ahead. Jesus faced the conflict, and our loving, reconciling God reached out in Love and declared the powers shall not rule forever. We are called to walk in that same obedience, that

same faith, that same promise that there is nowhere that we can go that God is not, no conflict that we can face that God cannot control, and nothing that cannot be changed when we follow on as disciples of the subversive Christ, trusting that just as God's love conquered all the evil of the passion week, God's love will lead us through whatever we may face, wherever we find ourselves, whatever challenges we are called to speak to. We are invited to hold on to this way—the way of the servant, even as we are equally and unequivocally called to release the way of power and privilege that would demand its own way above all else.

Palm Sunday calls us to join the journey, despite its difficulty, despite its challenges, despite its apparent impossibilities, and to walk in obedience as part of God's agenda and lay down our own.. May we hear this call and take it own as our own that we might have something to truly celebrate in the fullness of time and fullness of God's love. Amen.