

Message for Feb. 21, 2021 - Annual General Meeting

Lent 1 - The Parade, Risking Reputation

Mark 11.1-11

We are almost a whole year into worshipping solely online. When we began this journey last year, as we had our first dealings with this Pandemic, we declared it the Lentiest Lent to ever Lent. And yet, here we are again. Another Lent, still in a pandemic, and so very tired of it all.

This year, we have chosen to take a closer look at the Passion story as we journey toward Easter. I'm glad that we've chosen to do so, as I think/hope it will give us some guidance on how to cope with what we are currently enduring. Because that is the root of the Latin word, *passio* to endure, or to suffer. Now we don't often tend to spend a lot of time on the stories of Holy Week. I agree with Marcia McFee who says that's because it's a painful story. Most of us have enough pain that we are dealing with already - be that physical or existential or emotional or any combination of those.

We would much rather move from the seemingly joyful Palm Sunday parade to Easter morning life and skip the hard part—the pain of uncertainty, the pain of fear, the pain of loss and death. Picturing ourselves as part of the story is not too difficult here. But, isn't church supposed to make us feel better? Isn't every Sunday in Lent a "little Easter"? The truth is that pain and fear and despair don't take the weekend off.

If we were to skip over the unpleasant bits in an effort to make ourselves feel better, or at least not feel worse, I believe that we would be doing both the story and ourselves a disservice. We would be that thing that no church ever wants to be - irrelevant.

On this journey, we will look at all of our humanity in the journey of Jesus. Seeing ourselves in these difficult situations, and awkward conversations. Messy living full of emotion and ambiguity and the presence of the Divine.

Jesus enters into this story riding on a donkey, a young one. This is something that he has carefully considered and planned. For, as Amy-Jill Levine notes: if one is going to confront any system that prevents human wholeness - be it poverty, colonialism, or lack of compassion - it helps to have a plan. The crowd welcomes him. They spread out their coats, they cut branches to lay down a carpet for him. They cheer and they shout. *Hallelujah and Hosanna!* Hallelujah is an imperative telling us to “praise God, all of you!” and Hosanna means “save us, please!”

Amy-Jill Levine (and we’ll be quoting her a lot the next several weeks) points out that the crowd knows what it wants. “It wants what we all want. It wants political reform; it wants a humble leader; it wants compassion rather than conquest. It wants a balanced budget, affordable health care, clean water, peaceful streets, lower taxes, good schools...”

This is not something that magically happens. Just as we rely on God, we need to also be ready to live into God’s ways. As we shout Hallelujah and Hosanna, we must also ask ourselves - how much are we willing to contribute in order to achieve these goals? How much are we willing to take responsibility, to work to sacrifice?

This is where I give thanks that we include our annual meeting as a part of the worship of our community. The day to day operations are not something that just happens. They take the dedication and effort of so many folks. They show us just the beginning of what we can accomplish as a Spirit-led community. We are able to journey through Lent. We will support each other. We will face what is difficult. We will not be alone. We are not just bystanders in the crowd. We are a part of this story. This is our story. We will endure with passion and compassion.