

Sermon 4-13-25
Paul Purdue preaching

On Tuesday, as part of my Sermon prep, I counted 33 dress shirts in my bedroom closet. That is not counting a few in the laundry room, summer shirts in a big tote in our basement, and an entire wardrobe filled with t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters, outdoor and farm wear. If you added in pants, jeans, jackets, and coats I might have enough clothing to line a city block if there was another Palm Sunday Parade. Is it time to go to Goodwill?

What if you only had the clothes you were wearing, would you offer your only coat as a saddle or toss your tunic in front of the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem? Would you worry about the donkey's hooves tearing your coat? In 30 AD day laborers and working class people generally owned one change of clothes. People patched and repaired clothes wearing them every day for years. In Genesis 37, Joseph's older brothers loathe him for his coat of many colors that his dad gave him. After crucifying Jesus the soldiers gambled for his clothes. Exodus 22 mandated that if you took a neighbor's coat to secure a loan, you must return it before sunset. The commandment appeals to humanity more than legalism asking: "How will your neighbor keep warm?" And promising that when your cold neighbor cries out, God "will listen, because God is compassionate".

It might feel odd to take off our coats and line the roadway for Jesus, but it does not feel expensive. We live with such an abundance, but the market gods keep whispering we do not have enough.

As part of Passover the pilgrims carried bundles of palm branches to build ceremonial booths. Palm branches were a sign of victory for Jewish and Roman athletes and armies. In 164 Judas Maccabee celebrated the restoration of the Temple with a Palm Branch Parade during the Jewish revolt. Palm branches are deeply political signs.

The disciples commandeer a colt, like a king, simply saying "the Lord needs it". The crowd makes a red carpet of garments for Jesus and waves their palm frond pom poms. The crowds praise God in loud and joyful voices singing "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Writing to Greek Christians, Luke never mentions "the coming Kingdom of David" or the Hebrew Word "Hosanna" (God save us) in his Gospel. In Luke, the crowds rejoice recounting the healings they have seen. This is not an angry protest. It is a joyful coronation of Jesus as Prince of Peace, Lord of Love.

But, not everyone is singing! The Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples! Tell them to stop!" Pharisees like prophets and Puritans are often characterized as colossal killjoys, but that may not be the case. Why did the Pharisees want Jesus to shut down the Palm Sunday Parade? They are worried about Rome and the chief priests, legal experts and rulers who collaborate with the empire. How will the powers that be respond to Jesus riding up, his feet dragging the ground on the colt, the

disciples calling for a king who cares about people more than power, and the crowd singing songs of peace as they march to the palace? Back in Chapter 13, the Pharisees saw this coming. They warned Jesus that Herod wanted to kill him. The Pharisees worry that Jesus might do something to provoke the Roman collaborators like flipping over the tables of the money changers. I think the Pharisees care deeply about Jesus, the crowd, their nation and God's longed-for kingdom. Friends, if we make the Pharisees out as Jesus' enemies, we may miss the real enemies hidden inside systems, empires, princes, and principalities.

About 40 years after Jesus' death, a group of Jews revolted against Rome. The rebels retreated into Jerusalem walls. The Roman General Titus led 4 legions of Roman troops around 40,000 soldiers. They encircled, laid siege, killed thousands and enslaved all the residents who survived. The Romans tore down Jerusalem's protective wall and gates, along with the Temple and Herod's palace. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, who left no stone standing, Titus left three of the Herod's Palace and Temple complex's massive towers, so that anyone who passed through the destroyed city could see the high cost of rebelling against Rome. I think our Pharisee friends worried about that kind of suffering, the kind of suffering Jesus talks about in Matthew 24. It is worth noting, that after asking Jesus' disciples to pipe down about "coming Kings" the word Pharisee does not appear again in Luke's Gospel. In Luke's Gospel the Pharisees have no part in the plot to kill Jesus. Instead, after Jesus flips over the tables in the Temple Luke notes "the chief priests, the legal experts, and the foremost leaders among the people were seeking to kill Jesus".

The crowds are singing praises, the Pharisees are worrying about the Romans, but what about Jesus? How does Jesus react to this Palm Sunday parade?

As Jesus moves along the mount of olives, Jerusalem's skyline comes into view: massive walls, beautiful gates, the stunning temple and massive palace. Seeing the city Jesus weeps over it, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if you had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." The crowds are singing about "peace in heaven", while Jesus is weeping over the lack of peace on earth. On Christmas Eve the angels sang "Glory to God in heaven and peace on earth". God cares about peace, peace on earth, peace for all people. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called God's children." (Matt 5) Jesus rides towards Jerusalem longing for peace, even as he knows in his bones Jerusalem is a city that kills the prophets. (Matt 23)

Today are you singing songs of celebration, songs of freedom and victory? Are you worrying about unjust kings and wicked rulers? Are you weeping over the lack of peace in your home or in our world? Yes. The answer to all three can be yes. We can sing victory songs, as we name our anxiety in prayer, as we weep longing for peace, as we keep marching towards our Jerusalems! We keep on loving because to do less than love is to stop living. We overcome evil with good because we want to be good people and create a good world for ourselves and others.

Yes, we sing with hope, but how can we help but worry about evil and injustice? We can pray “lord deliver all us from evil” and “thine is the kingdom, power and glory now and forever.” We pass through worry, by taking our neighbors hands and staying together even if we weep. Weeping may be the most humane, the most holy, thing we can do when someone is suffering. And even if peace on earth alludes us, we keep moving, refusing to stop living as peacemakers- for we follow the Prince of peace and peacemaking is our true identity of the children of God.

As we enter into this holy week, we know it is one of the most emotionally grueling weeks of the church year. It is a week where we weep considering the suffering of Jesus and our world. And yet in the midst of Holy Week we see some of the most beautiful portraits of love, solidarity and hope.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us, Jesus took off his coat, wrapped a towel around his waist, grabbed a basin and washed the disciples’ feet declaring “a new commandment, I give you to love one another.” (John 13) As Jesus carried the cross down the Via Dolorosa, Jesus paused and spoke words of compassion and courage to grieving female disciples. (Luke 23) On the cross, Jesus tenderly entrusts his mother to John, his beloved disciple, and Jesus his beloved disciple to his mother. (John 19) Jesus hanging on the cross offers reconciliation and hope to a bandit dying next to him. Jesus, seeing the hateful crowds that seek to defile him with the most base inhumane cruelty, speaks words that shake our worldview: “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23) Matthew tells us the Romans Centurion standing by the cross, upon seeing how Jesus died declared, “surely this person was a child of God.” Oh the cross holds such mystery that we often forget what a strange symbol of salvation, incarnation, resurrection and peace that it is.

Today, we can sing songs of peace, justice, victory and healing. The songs remind us who we are and who God is calling us all to be. We can also weep and worry, for Jesus tells us that if we stop singing, the very rocks themselves will take up our song.

Maybe the rocks sing, knowing that unless a seed falls to the ground and dies it remains a single seed. Maybe the rocks sing, knowing love will overcome the evil in the world. Maybe the rocks sing, believing the truth in time will expose every lie. Maybe the rocks know that if the Romans knock over palaces and temples, the wind and birds will carry in wildflower seeds and remake the city. Maybe the rocks know that the universe bends towards Justice. Maybe the rocks sing
God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might, Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Maybe the rocks will sing until we lift every voice and sing, Maybe the rocks know the Choirs Good Friday anthem, "Heavy with weeping may the three days pass" but that Easter day brings laughter.

Maybe the rocks know, God is with us, in the blistering heat, hail, rain and snow,. Maybe the rocks know God is with us in our weeping, worrying, longing, lamenting and marching. Maybe the rocks know Easter is coming.