

Sermon for March 20, 2016 – “Enough”

Palm Sunday, Year C – Texts: Philippians 2:1-13, Luke 19:28-40

There’s a lot going on when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. One of the things that amazes me is how He heads right into the belly of the beast. He knows what He’s getting into. From the episode in the Garden of Gethsemane we also know that He’s not exactly thrilled about it. There’s a deep pain there. But, His face is set like flint towards Jerusalem. There’s no waver. No detour. And, Jesus isn’t just heading towards those who are plotting His death. I suppose one could easily imagine Him valiantly and bravely staring down the forces of darkness. But, He’s not just coming to reckon with Pilate and the Sanhedrin. Jesus is also going to Jerusalem to disappoint His followers.

Jerusalem is an occupied city, bent over backwards by the Romans. There’s a constant threat to life, liberty, and the religious and spiritual ideals that had been kindled in God’s people since the days of Abraham. The people of Jerusalem weren’t just hungry for freedom and victory, they yearned for it. They ached for it. And, when the Messiah came into Jerusalem that day riding on a donkey, they **knew** this was big. They just didn’t know what “big thing” Jesus had in mind. The palm branch and the cry of “hosanna” had been associated with the Feast of Tabernacles for centuries but ever since the Maccabean revolt in the 160’s BCE, they were also the second most important symbols of nationalistic pride. (The most important being the Temple itself.) They were reminders that God could do miraculous and amazing things. That God could conjure a victory from the deep recesses of oppression.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem the crowds didn’t sing their hosannas and wave their palm branches because they were **so** incredibly captivated by Jesus’ message of love and grace. Oh no. For them the Messiah was coming to raise up an army and with the help of God Rome would be sent running back to Italy with their pagan tales between their legs. You see, Jesus wasn’t just staring down His professed enemies. He was also coming to Jerusalem to disappoint His devotees in colossal fashion. They were ready for an uprising and a Military/political victory. Oh boy, were they ready for it! Jesus, on the other hand, was ready to take up his cross....And die. And so into Jerusalem and onto the cross he went.

As I said before, there’s a lot going on when Jesus enters the Holy City. Things of great significance. Things that both inform us and challenge us in our understanding of

- a) God and his plan for the world...
- b) Salvation and what that meant for humanity (indeed all of creation) and
- c) Who Jesus was and what he came to do.

But, we also have this icon of Christ moving towards conflict, pain as well as the reality that He’d end up being a great disappointment to others who’d laid so many expectations upon Him. He went anyway. One Christian writer talks about how creativity and living fully requires **vulnerability**. If we’re going to **do** great things, Well, then, we need to be willing to **dare to do** great things. This demands us to bear risk; the risk of failure, the risk of disappointing others, the risk of disappointing ourselves. Over and over. Again and again. It’s the risk to believe that the little voice inside which whispers over and over again “you aren’t (fill in the blank) enough” is just plain **wrong**. It’s the risk to believe that we are enough. You see, from God’s perspective, our worth has nothing to do with anything we’ve accomplished or any success we might’ve had. And so it’s OK to risk and fail. It’s OK to say “no,” and do something else.

Jesus is the icon of many great things. But, even more, he's the perfect image of a life lived without shame. Jesus doesn't proceed from the false assumption that he's not enough. That He needs more friends or that He needs more "likes" on Facebook. More people to tell him that He's right. Or how great He is. At his baptism, before his earthly ministry ever begins, he hears his Father's voice from Heaven saying "**You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.**" Not long after that He's got thousands of people following Him around, listening to Him, asking to be healed, asking to be fed. But Jesus' popularity peaks very early in His ministry and soon enough people begin to walk away from Him until the circle around Jesus is pretty small. If Jesus approached life like most of us, He'd be crushed. He'd be internally pulverized from all the rejection and persecution. In this sense, Palm Sunday is just a microcosm of His ministry. The brief attention of a multitude which quickly leads to the rejection of the same multitude. The crowd that greets Him with "hosanna," on Sunday, is shouting "crucify him" on Friday. To brave that takes a huge heart. But to brave that and still love, to seek forgiveness for those who reject Him and be willing to die for them? Well, that's just amazing!

Here's the thing, five days after Jesus risked it all and entered Jerusalem he was nailed to a cross in a brutal and humiliating fashion. If Jesus' story had ended there, we'd have said He was an absolute failure. We'd say: "Oh, He had so much potential", "He could've done so many things and changed the world." "But He had to go and get Himself killed, crucified no less". "He had to go and be a great disappointment". That's if we even talked about Him at all. But, Jesus shows us that disappointment doesn't have to have the last word. He shows us that, indeed, failure can walk out of a tomb and shatter the present powers of the world. That shame can even overcome the power of death! Jesus transformed the cross from a place of shame to a place of victory.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is enough! Therefore, **we** are enough!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.