

Sermon for Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018 – Enough!

Palm Sunday, Year B – Texts: Luke 19:29-44

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It was Palm Sunday but because of a sore throat, a 5-year-old little boy stayed home from church with a sitter. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm fronds. The little boy asked them what they were for. “People held them over Jesus’ head as He walked by,” his father told him. “Wouldn’t you know it,” the little boy fumed...”the one Sunday I don’t go and He shows up.”

There’s a lot going on when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. One of the things that amazes me about the story is how Jesus rides that donkey right into the belly of the beast. But, make no mistake, 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 is no waver. There is no detour. Still, Jesus isn’t just heading toward those plotting His death. In fact, I suppose one could easily imagine Him bravely and heroically 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 constant threat to life, liberty, and religious expression, those which had been kindled in God’s people since the days of Abraham which were a part of their identity as God’s people. You see, the people of Jerusalem weren’t just hungry for freedom and victory. They ached for it. They yearned for it. And, when the Messiah walked 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 penultimate symbols of nationalistic pride. Reminders that God could do miraculous and amazing things, that God could conjure a victory from the deep recesses of oppression. So, 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. No, for them, the Messiah was coming to raise up an army, and with God’s help, the Romans would be sent running with their pagan tails 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, a military/political victory. Jesus, on the other hand, was ready to take up His cross and die. So, into Jerusalem and to the cross He went.

As I said, there’s a lot going on when Jesus enters the Holy City. Things of great theological, soteriological, and Christological significance. That is to say, things dealing with God and what God was up to, what was going on in terms of God’s promised plan of salvation, things that had a direct bearing on our understanding of who Jesus was and what He was there to do. But, what we also have is an iconic Christ moving towards conflict, and pain, toward the reality that He’d ultimately end up being a great disappointment to others, those who’d laid so many expectations upon Him. Expectations that had been building for hundreds of years. He went anyway.

A few years ago, Brené Brown wrote a book, *Daring Greatly*. In it, she talks about how creativity and living fully requires **vulnerability**. She wrote that “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.” She believes that if we’re going to **do** great things then we need to be willing to dare to do great things. This demands us to take and (probably more importantly) bear risk. Risk of failure, risk of disappointing others, risk of disappointing ourselves – again, and again. It’s the risk to believe that the little voice inside each of us is wrong. You know the voice I mean. It’s the one that repeatedly whispers, “you aren’t _____ enough.” You aren’t good enough...smart enough...strong enough...faithful enough...tall enough...thin enough...adequate enough...worthy enough. Well, guess what? WE ARE! We **are** enough. God apparently thinks so because to God our worth doesn’t come from our accomplishments or our successes. So, it’s OK to risk and fail. It’s OK to say “no,” and do something else.

Jesus is iconic in many ways, not least among these ways is the way in which He’s the absolute role model for a life lived without shame. For Jesus, whether He’s good enough isn’t even a question. He doesn’t need more friends, more “likes” on Facebook, or more followers on Twitter, more people to tell Him that He’s right. In fact, when you take a look at scripture Jesus’ popularity actually peaks very early in His ministry. Not long after He’s baptized, He has thousands of people following Him around, listening to Him, asking to be healed, asking to be fed. But, not long after that 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, an emotional wreck from all the rejection and persecution. In this sense, Palm Sunday’s just a microcosm of His entire ministry. We see the brief attention of a multitude one day leading to rejection by the same multitude less than a week later! Seems to me that braving something like that takes a huge heart. But, braving that and still be in love with those who reject Him? Being willing to die for them? Well, that’s nothing short of amazing. What wondrous love is this indeed!

Five days after Jesus risked it all and entered Jerusalem He was nailed to a cross in brutal and humiliating fashion. And if the story of Jesus had ended there, we’d have said that He was an absolute failure. Worthless. At best, we would’ve said “Oh, He had so much potential”. “He could have done so many things and changed the world, but He had to go and be a great disappointment.” But, Jesus shows us that disappointment doesn’t have the last word; that when it comes to failure looks can be deceiving. In fact, disappointment can walk out of a tomb and shatter the present powers of this world. It can, and it did!

Brothers and sisters, here’s the thing. Jesus is enough. And, for that reason, we are enough!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.