

Giving of Ourselves

When “The Lord Needs It”

Palm/Passion Sunday

Luke 19:28-40
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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When I was growing up everyone knew this Sunday before Easter simply as Palm Sunday. Sometime between then and now, however, Presbyterians, and I'm sure most all mainline denominations who follow the liturgical church calendar, also started designating this Sunday before Easter as Passion Sunday.

The emphasis of **Palm Sunday**, of course, is to commemorate Jesus' jubilant entry into the city of Jerusalem, which we later learn turns out to be the last week of his life. This story, recorded in all four gospels, is basically an enactment of the Old Testament prophetic poem from **Zechariah 9:9**.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Today's gospel reading, therefore, is the story that announces the fulfillment of that prophesy, and that the new era of God's rule has dawned. Such a joy-filled story indeed. Why muddy the waters, therefore, by introducing the theme of **Passion Sunday**, the story of Jesus' suffering and death? Well, the answer can most likely be found in the scenario of a church committee somewhere deciding not enough people were attending the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services of worship. Thereby, most church-going folks simply jumped from the hosannas of Palm Sunday directly into the celebration of the resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Why bother with all that grizzly death and crucifixion stuff in-between? Perhaps the best explanation I've ever heard appeared just this week in an article by Jill Duffield, editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook*. She writes:

I can imagine how it felt to be Jesus' closest friends and followers when the world bowed at his feet, threw cloaks in his path, and sang of his greatness. I recognize this kind of victorious faith and I worry too often we contemporary Christians stop at Palm Sunday and neglect to keep following or forget what happens later in the week.

Palm Sunday praises devoid of the passion make for a hollow, dangerous religion. When we fail to keep following Jesus the next day and the next and the next, all the way to the cross, we **envision a Christianity synonymous with winning, rather than a faith that requires vulnerable love and sacrifice.**

Unlike our current political climate that obsessed with "so much winning," as well as a large part of Christianity today, **living a life dedicated to following the ways and teachings of Jesus is not all about winning. That's triumphalism, not the gospel. Rather, biblical Christianity is about the often-difficult ways of love and service, forgiveness, and redemption.** Passion Sunday, therefore, is meant to remind us of Jesus' journey to the cross, his execution at the hands of those whose power he questioned and threatened.

Preachers like myself, therefore, face a decision each and every year at this time. Focus on the palms or the passion, or maybe a little of both? I'll let you in on a little secret, that's not really so secret. Taking a cue primarily from the hymns we sing, and the music played on the organ, our service of worship each year on this Sunday is structured to transition from remembering the palms at the beginning of the service to remembering the cross by the end of the service. Hey, why not cover all our bases?

So, what will the theme of the sermon focus on this year? Well, I'm just going to go ahead and assume all of you *will* be attending the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services of worship this year. (And yes, I know what they say about what happens when you make assumptions.) That will free me up this morning to spend a little more time on the joyous entry into Jerusalem story. So like a well-constructed symphony, I'll concentrate on the first movement today and let the full symphony play out throughout Holy Week, concluding with the final dramatic movement on Easter Sunday.

Over the years I've primarily focused on **the theme of expectations**, mentioning that Palm Sunday is a celebration of the expectations that the Jewish people in the crowd that day had for this teacher and prophet named Jesus of Nazareth. I've then spent time reflecting on what those historic expectations were of a messiah. And, within a short five-day period of time, the crowd who joyously shouted "Hosanna" would scream out "Crucify him" when they realized **Jesus did not measure up to their expectations.** This always led into a good discussion of **what happens when your expectations, and mine, aren't met. That includes the expectations we have of ourselves, as well as of others.**

Though it's worth reminding ourselves of that important conversation that we need to have with ourselves and with others, that's not the primary focus this morning. Instead, there is one particular element of the story that hit me this week to which I've never paid that much attention. Before entering Jerusalem, Luke tells us that when Jesus arrived at the Mount of Olives he sent two of his disciples into the nearby village to look for a colt that has never been ridden. They are told to untie it and bring it to Jesus. But Jesus also instructs them that if anyone asks them why they are untying it to simply tell that person, "The Lord needs it." **"The Lord needs it," was the deposit, payment, and collateral for taking the donkey.** Here's the question I'd like each of us to take-away on this Palm Sunday.

- **What does Jesus ask you to give because he has need of it?**

Have you ever reflected on the fact that in the realm and kin-dom of God, *you* are needed - needed to help carry on the work and ministry and way of life begun by

Jesus? So, what is it that you possess that is needed by God to help fulfill these tasks? Our own John Calvin, to whom we Presbyterians trace our roots to 500 years ago, would most likely answer that question this way. **What does Jesus need: everything you have, and everything you are is needed.** If you have a donkey, hey maybe that's needed. What about your generosity, your intelligence, your musical or artistic ability, the ability to work with your hands, your caring and compassionate spirit, your wisdom, your zeal and passion for social justice?

Listen to that still small voice within, or perhaps that voice that comes from a loved one, or a pastor, that says, "The Lord needs it." What might that be today? What might that be tomorrow and the next day? **What can you give of yourself when the Lord needs it?** Here's a note addressed from God to us, written by Steve Garnaas-Holmes that might help. It's called "I have need of it."

My dear one,
 your heart, your time,
 your prayer, your imagination,
 your faith and your doubt—
 I need it.

Your thoughts, your voice,
 the way you treat strangers,
 I need it.

I need your presence
 where there is hurt.

I need your risk in loving those
 who are hard to love,
 your vulnerability in caring for what is heartbreaking,
 your hope in the dawn long before dawn.

I need you to convey me into the city,
 to bear me into people's hearts.

You, donkey-plain,
 ordinary and waiting,
 you are what I need.

Listen:
 I have sent my servants
 to untie you.

Amen.

Resources:

Steve Garnaas-Holmes, "I have need of it", www.unfoldinglight.net, 4-9-19.