

Palm Sunday Year B 2018

Mark 11:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

[Mark 15:1-47]

On Palm Sunday,
We remind each other
That we are part of the great story
Of the people of God
In every time and place.
On this day,
We reenact what we remember,
Joining the great parade,
Shouting Hosanna with the joyful crowd,
And later,
Shouting *Crucify him*
With the angry mob.

Today we remind each other
That the stories we tell and the words we say
Are always true.
Always true,
Always freely offered for us and everyone,
Always mysterious.

This is one mystery:
The story we remember and reenact today
Is the story of a man on a donkey.
We have stories of glory streaming from the heavens,
Stories of abundance shared by all,
Stories of healing and renewal.
But today, in our parade around the block,
We follow a man on a donkey.

We tell and take part in the story
Of the man on a donkey
As if it were the only game in town.
But there are always other stories swirling around the edges,
Waiting to collide with this story,
Mock it,
Swallow it up.

There's the story of empire,

The story of Herod and Pilate.
At the moment Jesus was riding into Jerusalem
On a donkey,
On the other side of the city,
All the might of imperial Rome,
With chariots and horses,
Was parading into the city of God by a better gate,
Showing what power and might look like on display.

Jesus's ride is a rival parade,
Sign of a rival kingdom,
God's commonwealth of love and justice.
A rival kingdom,
But not the kingdom for which his followers hoped.

Some of them were hoping
For a story of revolution.
Jesus looked different, on his donkey,
Than imperial might.
But his friends, maybe,
Thought he would challenge might with might,
Calling the people who were shouting Hosanna
To rise up and follow him
In the long awaited revolution.

But no.
After the big parade,
He looked all around the temple,
And then went to spend the night with friends
Outside the city.
No revolution.

There's the story of empire,
The story of revolution.
And there's the story of failure.

The one who is adored today,
With branches of palm spread along his way,
Will die a criminal's death
Before we know it.
It looks like a failure.
But it is the announcement of another way.

All these stories – empire, revolution, failure –
try to crowd our story out.
But they are powerless

Before the way that gives up power for love.
Jesus will never take the way of force.
His way is the way of love.

It looks like a failure.
But it is the beginning of new life.

It looks as though the power story wins,
When the man on the donkey
Is captured, tortured, and killed.
But we know the end of the story.
Love wins.
No matter what.
Love wins.
If we stay in the story
That has been given to us,
Love will win.
Not today.
But forever.

Which brings me to this moment in our life together,
In this faith community so many of us hold so dear.

If you are a visitor or newcomer among us,
Or if you are standing apart from the fray,
As we agonize – yes, agonize,
Over a moment of crisis,
Where we must make a decision
About our future,
I invite you to stay with me for a few moments
By remembering some similar time in your own life.

When have you felt conflicted,
Or discounted, or seen something precious slipping away?
When have you wondered if an action would have dire consequences?
When have you wondered what to do?
Go to that time, and wonder with me from there.

And those among us – many of us gathered here –
Who find ourselves mired in a controversy
That is deeper and more difficult than we knew,
Wonder with me now as well.

Just to be clear, here's what I'm talking about:
Our proposed permanent supportive housing development
No longer includes

Automobile parking that we own and control in perpetuity –
Or the foreseeable future –
Whichever comes first.
There are other changes to our original plans,
But this is the crux of the matter.

Where shall we go from this moment?

Some of us believe we are called to take a risk
And continue with our plans.
Some of us believe we are called to preserve
What is precious by giving up our plans.

There are so many questions.
How did we get here?
I certainly wonder that,
But the way forward starts with a different question.

What should we do?
I certainly wonder that as well,
But I believe the answer to that question
Is waiting for us in the future,
And will only reveal itself later.

What would Jesus do?
The man on a donkey –
What would he do?
I have asked a couple of wise mentors that,
And they have only smiled,
And spoken of love,
And patience, and forbearance.

In the midst of all my questions,
And confusion, and doubt,
There is only one thing I know for sure –
Or maybe two.

The moment we face,
Is a moment of discernment.
That may seem obvious,
But when I say,
This is a moment of discernment,
I am also saying what it is not.

The moment we face
Is not a moral choice

Between right and wrong,
Or good and evil.
Not a moral choice.
It might be easier if it were.

But no, the moment we face,
Weighing the cost and promise
Of continuing our partnership in order to build housing
On our parking lot,
Weighing the cost and promise
Of delaying or discontinuing the partnership,
This requires us to enter in to the spiritual practice of discernment,
Of asking the question,
How shall we join ourselves to the dream of God?

There are some basic assumptions
That must be in place for discernment to happen.
One is that we are free,
That we have agency and choice.
One is that we are actors in a good world,
Where a good God is active and engaged
In bringing forth more good.
And another is that if God is present in our struggle to discern,
Then God will be present in the outcome.

Can we believe this?
Do we believe that we are free?
Do we believe that a good God
Is bringing forth good in the world?
Do we believe that God will be with us,
However we go forward from this moment?

I believe this,
And invite you to join me in trusting that this is true.
Whatever constraints bind us,
We are free in faith.
However dark the world grows,
The essence at the heart of all things is good,
And flows from the heart of a good God.
However lonely the way may seem,
There is nowhere we can go where God is not.

We face a choice, as a community.
The world is changing around us,
And some hopes have faded,
Some possibilities have vanished.

We still have a choice.

I don't know what we will choose.
I don't know what the consequences will be.
But I have been set free,
In my own heart and mind,
By this knowledge:
We are not choosing between right and wrong.
We are trying to find the way forward
Where the promise outweighs the cost.
We are listening for the dream of God
For this place where the tree of life has been growing,
And, God willing,
Will continue to grow.

We are looking for an authentic way
To be a sanctuary in the city.
I don't know yet
What that appealing and ambiguous word,
Sanctuary,
Means for us right now.

There's a lot I don't know
But I have only one real question.
Where is hope?
The way forward, wherever it leads,
begins with hope.

The hope that is not a feeling,
But a virtue to be tended,
A grace to be given.
I know we have hope;
I know also, that right now, we have to find it.

On this Palm Sunday,
I wonder if the sign of hope,
As startling now as it was then,
Is a man riding on a donkey,
With branches spread along his way.

He offers a different way forward,
A story that has nothing to do with power and might,
With success,
Even with being right.

Jesus did not do

What his disciples expected.
They must have thought this was the moment
When he would show himself in all his glory.
But that moment is still in the future.

And still, the way he offers begins now.

Love can win here,
No matter which way we go.
Love can win,
As long as we believe that the man on the donkey
Is not the king of power,
But the king of love.
As long as we remember
That he will forgive us,
Even if we fail.
As long as we remember
That there is no failure,
If he is with us.

To tell you the truth,
I have no idea,
At this moment,
What Jesus would do if he were here.

But he is here.
No matter what we do.
He is here.

Not on a donkey;
He doesn't need it anymore.

He is here,
Among us,
Within us,
No matter what.

So follow him through this week.
Nothing is happening to us here
That has not happened before.
We are part of the story.
And we already know the ending.
Love will win.
No matter what.