

Palm Sunday April 5, 2020---

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' ⁴This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ 'Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' ¹¹The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Sermon: Blessed is the One Who Comes

I heard the earthquake on Tuesday night as much as I felt it. I was walking through my hallway into the kitchen when I heard it—a sound that began like a large truck roaring by and then grew as if an elephant with legs the size of massive tree trunks was barreling through the backyard. Then added to that was the sound of clinking glass. It was

then that I felt the ground rolling and I knew this was not an elephant, but an earthquake.

I have been through a few earthquakes in my life. I was in the third grade in 1983, at home waiting for the school bus when I remember all of the hanging plants starting to move. I was serving in Hood River in 2001 when I could feel the effects of the earthquake in Seattle.

Earthquakes are very unsettling things. The ground rolling and shaking is disconcerting. It reminds us that we are not in control. This week, the earthquake on top of this coronavirus left most of us anxious, unsettled and wondering what is next.

So it is interesting to enter into the Holy Week story and realize that there are a couple of references to earthquakes in this story too.

Today is Palm Sunday—the Sunday we mark Jesus’ entrance through the Golden or Eastern gate into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Jesus’ journey that would end with Jesus’ death on the cross.

Today we join the crowd—keeping our physical distance of course. This crowd has been following Jesus through his ministry, hearing him teach, seeing his miracles of healing and even being fed by loaves and fish. They now follow him into Jerusalem shouting Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Then the scripture says, “When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking ‘Who is this?’”

The Greek word for turmoil means shaken or trembled. While not a literal earthquake, it certainly is an metaphorical earthquake—symbolizing the unsettled sense that something was about to happen and the city and its people were not in control.

It was the beginning of Passover, the Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. People were

beginning to gather in the city. There are some estimations that over 200,000 pilgrims had gathered in the city for Passover.

Jesus was not the only parade that was happening in Jerusalem that day.

Entering Jerusalem from the west was the Roman governor of Judea—Pontius Pilate. He would have had with him at least 1000 Roman soldiers on chariots, horseback and on foot with all of their weapons and regalia. This procession was a show of force designed to suppress any thoughts of rebellion among the people during Passover. And he intended as a show of who was really in charge—to crucify a couple of rebels later in the week.

The second parade was of King Herod Antipas riding on a war horse who entered from the North with his own set of soldiers and show of military might. He ruled over Galilee and Perea, north and east of Judea. He, like Pilate, knew how to use force and might to show who was really in charge.

You can imagine the unsettledness of the city and its people. You cannot have the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and King Herod Antipas and all their military might come into your city, without some sense of unsettledness and fear. They were not known for being kind and compassionate. You can just feel the unsettled, discontented feeling that something was about to happen--- the earth shaking and rolling.

Our current time is a bit different. But there is still turmoil—the shaking going on in our world as well. What we knew even a month ago is gone and in its place is this unsettled sense of what is becoming a new normal—isolation, fear, anxiety, wondering what is next. The questions of how do we live through this, will we get back to normal? And truly, our Tuesday earthquake reminded us that we are not in control.

We need good news. ---- Our good news comes from this figure riding on a donkey.

As Jesus rides into the city, the people shout—Hosanna a phrase that means Save or help us, we pray.

Save us Jesus, they shout.

Help us Jesus, they pray.

Save us from turmoil, from this shaking, unsettled time we are living in with military might marching into our city.

Save us, Jesus we shout

Help us Jesus, we pray. Save us from the turmoil, the shaking and unsettledness of the Coronavirus and this new world we are living in.

This is the good news—This Jesus who entered through that Golden East gate riding on a donkey has come to save us.

Jesus came in a very different way than the Kings who road in through different gates. They came with military might and power, ruling with fear and demanding complete obedience.

Jesus comes fulfilling the words of the Prophets. The Prophet Zechariah in 9:9-10⁹ 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.

And Isaiah 62:10-11

Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.

¹¹ The Lord has proclaimed

to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,
‘See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.’

Jesus comes to us humble riding on a donkey not a war horse. He comes through the gates preparing the way, showing us that our salvation has come. Jesus comes to us as we shout Save us, help us we pray. Jesus comes showing us what God’s kingdom looks like.

Jesus comes as our salvation and restoration. Jesus comes as our king, not under a banner of might and fear but under the banner of love, grace and redemption of God. Jesus comes showing and reminding us that we are loved and cared for even in unsettling times.

There is a cost to this—Jesus had told his disciples three times—the last time just before he enters Jerusalem that he would be arrested, condemned to death, crucified and then on the third day be raised.

We know that on Friday, Jesus death will come on a cross. We know that after he breaths his last breath, there will be an earthquake—earth will shake and the rocks will split.

It is this cost—our seeing Jesus’ love for us on the cross and seeing our salvation front and center and knowing that the resurrection is coming, that gives us the good news to walk without fear through our own unsettled, shaking and rolling world.

Through Jesus, we receive the life giving gift of Christ. The assurance of God with us always, walking with us, the power of God available to us through this Christ. The light of Christ that shines in the darkness.

So even though our world has changed, even though the world rolled and quaked on Tuesday, we can say with assurance the words of Psalm 118.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever!

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵

²⁹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Amen