

March 20, 2016 – Palm Sunday
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - “Weeping Over Jerusalem”

When God created the world, what do you think he hoped for?

Have we, as God’s created beings, lived up to our potential?

Have we tended the earth, made wise decisions, cared for one another as God had envisioned?

When God decided to send his son to reconcile humanity’s relationship with God there is no doubt in my mind that God hoped Jesus’ ministry would be successful.

Today’s passage gives us a glimpse of how God, through Jesus, felt when it all began to unravel.

Jesus’ and his followers parade into Jerusalem with high hopes that the status quo will be toppled.

Perhaps the disciples had more optimism than Jesus.

They believed that they had found the Messiah.

They have been witnesses to miracles and students of profound lessons.

Their faith in this rabbi from Nazareth was zealous.

They marched into Jerusalem on a wave of excitement.

They are going for the simple solution – hoping that Jesus will use his power to restore Israel and banish the Roman occupiers.

Jesus, however, knew otherwise.

Jesus marched into Jerusalem with a broken heart.

On the path down from the Mount of Olives, he paused and wept.

“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”

He has told them. He has shown them. He has taught them...and they just don’t understand.

I wonder if we have learned anything from this ancient lesson, heard every year of our lives.

I wonder if we understand the things that make for peace.

Jesus is calling for a new way of life, rejecting the practice of armed revolution while calling for social revolution.

He wants his followers to understand that there is power in being loved by God.

The heart of the Palm Sunday celebration is God coming to God's people in faithfulness and love.

Jesus enters Jerusalem as the one who will suffer – this is the doorway to his passion – and in his suffering invites people into God's grace and presence.

This arrival of God will not be resisted or stopped.

It can only be received and enjoyed.

It is interesting to note that only Luke includes the Pharisees' plea for Jesus to ask the crowds to be silent, and Jesus' response that if the people were to stop singing, the stones would cry out.

It is most likely that the Pharisees were concerned for how Rome would interpret this procession and the songs the people were singing.

The last thing they wanted was a revolution – for both personal and national reasons.

Jesus' response demonstrates Luke's understanding of God's salvation that comes in Christ.

God's Reign, which for Luke is the expression of God's salvation, and the reality into which the saved are brought, is unstoppable.

It is personal and social, and is as concerned with justice as it is with personal restoration and forgiveness.

In proclaiming that even the stones would cry out, Jesus declares that God's Reign will not be silenced by the powers that be, and that it includes and impacts the whole of creation.

When God's Sent One comes, the entire created order knows it and responds to it.

Writer Walter Wink points out that "Jesus' hearers were people who were subjected to the very indignities of being slapped in the face or forced to carry a soldier's bag, continually forced to stifle outrage at their dehumanizing treatment by the hierarchical system of caste and class, race and gender, age and status as a result of imperial occupation."

Jesus' strategy for achieving peace was the constructive use of nonviolence tactics that rob the oppressor of the power to humiliate.

I deny you the power to humiliate me.

I am a human being, just like you.

Wink calls it *Jesus' Third Way* distinguishing it from the first way that is violence and the second, which is passive nonviolence.

The Third way calls on followers to employ resistant nonviolence, one that is confrontational and coercive without being lethal, an approach designed to confront, disarm, and raise the consciousness of the oppressor and demean his power and authority.

Ghandi is reported to have said that ‘The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.’

It is important that we not tame our Palm Sunday remembrance and domesticate it into a meaningless annual ritual.

Jesus was angry when he got to Jerusalem.

His brief ministry – just three years – was coming to an end, a violent end.

In the week ahead we will journey with him to that end.

We will hear his words and experience just a bit of the sorrow that was shared.

Today we are at the parade, but by Thursday we will desert him and on Friday we will be in the crowd calling for his crucifixion, watching as he is nailed to a cross.

We will watch him die.

We will hear his last breath.

Next Sunday, Easter, we will celebrate the glorious mystery of resurrection.

We will joyfully shout our Alleluias giving thanks and praise to Jesus the Christ for dying for our sins.

But, my friends, we cannot go from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday without acknowledging what happens in between.

As you go about your business in the week ahead, pause every once in a while and think about what is happening in Jesus’ life at that moment.

Is he with his disciples celebrating Passover;

is he praying in the garden of Gethsemane seeking strength and courage to face his death;

is he standing before Pilate;

is he wearing a crown of thorns;

is he looking at you as you deny him?

Today we are at the parade, and next week we will be at the tomb.

Let’s not forget that.

I want to conclude with a poem by Ann Weems called *Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem*:

*There is but one face
Whose holy eyes
Won't turn away,
But focus on us
And weep...
Jesus, you!
Like a mother hen
Yearning to gather us to you,
But we would not...
For we have killed the prophets
And stoned the messengers.
Now abandoned and empty,
The stones of the temple
Waiting to fall
Around our ankles,
We still do not come
To you,
And, even now,
You weep.*