

Boldly stand and walk with Jesus

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29; Luke 19: 28-40

It isn't enough anymore to simply stand on the sidelines. It isn't enough to simply say I will pray for you. It isn't enough to simply do what is best for us or to live our spiritual life in isolation. It's time to engage in a time-honoured ritual of proclaiming. Proclaiming that "the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you" to which we respond, "and also with you." It's time to stand and commit to the direction that God has called us. We are being called together for a common purpose, a common goal, a common dream. We shall build a place that walks with the oppressed and the persecuted. We are being called to enter, exercise and engage in things that make peace in this world.

What are the things that make for peace? A common experience. The most powerful example of how a common experience can bring people together is during tragic events. It's during these times of crisis for humans that the things that keep us apart suddenly don't matter. All that matters is life. The Psalm is a song that the people on the roads to Jerusalem sang as Jesus entered on a borrowed colt. Throughout Lent we have focused on the power of ritual and today we engaged in a time honoured ritual of singing praises to God together while we waived our palms. The Psalm reflects a public liturgical practice that begins with a statement of thanksgiving for God's love and deliverance followed by a petition to God asking for something, the call to open the gate and to let us be a part of what is to happen and finally ending with an offering of thanksgiving to God who is our salvation.

We proclaim today with great fanfare, with the waving of palms that God's steadfast love endures forever. God's *hesed*. *Hesed* is the Hebrew word for God's steadfast love. But even on this most festive day, the palms cast shadows. Shadows of the builders rejecting stones because they were not perfect. The stones would not hold the structure together in a way that would maintain the social norms of society. The stones that were rejected were the undesirable, the outcast, the abnormal. Shadows were created by the Pharisees who were afraid, who wanted the crowd cheering for Jesus as he entered to be quiet, who felt that the people were being too political for fear that empire would retaliate. Shadows of some of the disciples who would end up failing Jesus through denial, through betrayal; who did not ground themselves in faith, but who were human and let fear stop them from following Jesus as they knew they should and wanted to. Shadows that exist today of faithful followers who want the parade to enter the sanctuary and stay, rather than a parade that is meant to process out into the world where God's

mission unfolds. Our common experience is found in the engagement of communal rituals. A process that restores people to a life of relationship.

The second thing that makes for peace is a common purpose. We are seeking peace in this world and we are not alone, but in order to achieve this we must heed Jesus' teachings and actions. It isn't enough to love the people who are easy to love. It isn't enough to simply claim a Christian identity. The peace that Jesus offers is a peace that exists in a world of unconditional love; where we are loved in spite of ourselves. Where we learn to truly forgive one another.

One of the earliest rituals, according to Luke began on Palm Sunday and it is the ritual of passing the peace, where we say, 'the peace of our lord Jesus Christ be with you,' and we respond with, 'and also with you.' It is the promise and announcement of what God makes possible in his death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a statement of deliverance, a promise of salvation. ¹The belief that we will be lifted up in the midst of trouble and in the time of suffering. Salvation does not deny the reality of suffering, but it gives us a path, a road, a promise of help. Help to walk us through the pain toward peace.

William G. Carter shared a story about a conversation he had with his father when he was in seminary. "His father had been in the military and told his son that the one thing they should teach preachers in seminary is that we will never have peace on earth until we can quiet the wars within our own hearts."² Engaging in rituals is one of the ways that we can quiet the wars within our hearts. Prayer is also a way that we can quiet the wars in our hearts, but none of this matters if we do not participate in the practices that have been provided to us.

The third thing that makes for peace is a humble hope-filled approach. Entering our faith through ritual also helps us to live humbly in this world. We, like Jesus, need to approach our lives and the world with humbleness. Starting from a place of grace and understanding, rather than power, judgment and distrust. Here are the words of the psalmist today, 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.' Or in the words of the Gospel, 'some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "teacher order the disciples to stop." And Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent the stones would shout out."' God chooses the rejected, the outcast and he sees them as essential. The key to bringing peace into this world. God is calling us to reverse our expectations about what faith will do for us. Our world will never find peace if we continue to reject stones based on how people fit within the human built structures. God chooses us for good that which we often reject.

Kimberly Clayton writes, "the worlds judgments are often wrong, at odds with the judgments and purposes of God."³ So, the fourth thing that makes for peace is not staying quiet. Not

¹ William G. Carter, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C Volume 2, p. 152.

² _____, p. 156.

³ Kimberly L. Clayton, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C Volume 2, p. 150.

standing idly by, but rather standing boldly and walking with Jesus while proclaiming boldly that the steadfast love of the lord never ceases.

There's a blog that was written several years ago by Frederick Schmidt⁴ and it was entitled, 'Twelve Things that your Pastor, Priest or Minister wishes you knew.' As we enter Jerusalem today with Jesus, I want you to hear these words as if they were Jesus' wishes that we all knew. So,

1. Bring your gifts to the table. It's important to remember, especially on Palm Sunday, that Jesus did not go it alone. Jesus called 12 disciples to walk with him, to stand with him and to pray with him and to be with him through it all.
2. Don't forget to show up. Your presence is needed for God works through people, through the church, and that work requires your presence and your participation.
3. Remember that Leigh and I are not here to be the religious or spiritual performers. Take responsibility for fostering and nurturing your spiritual life.
4. Even leaders of faith need grace.
5. We can't hold together a church that you are determined to remake to suit yourself. We seek to discern the will of God.
6. You are all a source of encouragement to us.
7. Remember that no one is perfect.
8. Pray for us as we pray for you. On Palm Sunday the people came, the people cheered, the people engaged, and we need to remember that Jesus didn't ride in with an army behind him ready for war, to win what was rightfully his. Nor did he ride in with the belief that he would claim the power that was his and destroy anything that got in his way.

William Carter says further;

“Jesus rides no high horse, just a lowly colt He chooses to enter a deadly situation without force or protection. He gives himself freely and without reservation.’ This is a prophetic act, a sign of God’s vulnerable love which risks everything and promises to gain all. This is the means by which God creates peace.”⁵

Peace comes when we remember that ***this is my body broken for you***. Light comes through cracks and illuminates and brings healing and peace to those who are open, vulnerable, the rejected, the broken, the lost and the lonely. Peace is found in the acceptance of the steadfast love that is offered and freely give. So, let's stand up and walk boldly with Jesus this week as we enter the last moments of his life, his death and the promise of his resurrection. So, parade out into that world and stand boldly friends. Go and be disciples for Jesus. Amen.

⁴ Frederick Schmidt, *12 Things that Your Pastor, Priest, or Minister Wishes You Knew*. May 12, 2016, www.patheos.com.

⁵ William G. Carter, p. 156.