

Following the Way

Mark 11:1-11

Susan S. Izard

March 28, 2021

I have always loved Palm Sunday. It was a happy day at church and at my home. By Palm Sunday we'd begun to anticipate Easter. When I was young, my mother always made us new Easter dresses so by Palm Sunday she was sewing for at least one of the three of us. We were anticipating upcoming Easter egg hunts. That meant coloring eggs for our entire family including the grandparents and aunts and uncles who would come up on the train for Easter lunch. At church, the young children were included in the first part of the adult worship service. We called it "big church." We were given palms and processed down the aisle waving them singing the hymn *Ride On, Ride On in Majesty*. We were a part of the Palm Sunday parade! I loved it and can remember being filled with joy.

Our scripture teaches something similar today. The scripture passage is often called "*The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*." The story is familiar. As Jesus is approaching Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, he sends two of his disciples ahead of him to get a colt. Bringing it to him, the disciples spread their cloaks on it while other followers lined the road with leafy branches. Mark tells us that those who walked ahead of Jesus and those who walked behind were shouting:

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

During Lent we had the privilege of having New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan speak to us in two Zoom webinars sponsored by the John P. Webster Library. We were fortunate to hear his teachings about the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Those lectures are available through the library if you're interested). Some years ago, John Dominic Crossan co-authored a book with Marcus Borg titled, *The Last Week*. In the first chapter they talked about Palm Sunday – *The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*. It is interesting to note that on the eve of Passover each year, Pontius Pilate and his army would enter Jerusalem through the west gate in order to control the crowds during the Passover festival. Pilate's parade proclaimed the power of empire. In contrast, Jesus' parade came through the east gate of the city proclaiming the Kingdom of God. One parade was about power and might; another, about love and peace.

As Palm Sunday people, we are invited to join Jesus' parade. We are invited to choose the way of love. One way of joining the parade is to care for others.

I was speaking with a woman the other day who is a retired nurse. This past December she made the decision to come out of retirement in order to help give Covid vaccines. She and her husband decided to live a very secluded existence in order to ensure that she remained as healthy as possible for the people she helped each day. Each morning she rises early,

foregoing her more relaxed retirement routine in order to work eight to ten-hour days. Often, she gives as many as 130 vaccines in a day. She is naturally a very helpful person who keeps an eye out for those who need assistance and goes out of her way to assist people who are confused by the computer registration and its various steps. She did not need this job and she misses time with her family, but she feels that there is a higher calling to care for others. It is her way of serving with kindness and love.

Another way to join this parade is to pay attention to our inner spiritual journey. The way of love invites us to open our hearts to God – to soften our hearts so we can rest in God’s love. When we know we are loved, we become people of love.

Our Monday book group, *Awakening the Spirit* is currently reading a wonderful book by Matthew Fox, *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic and Beyond*. Julian of Norwich was a 13th century Christian mystic who lived during the time of the Plague. You might remember that 50 percent of the population in Europe died during the Plague. Julian knew all about suffering and death. Some scholars think that her husband and children died from the Plague before she became an anchoress at the age of 30. The first woman to write a book in English, she recorded her mystical experiences because she realized that they were not given just to her but to everyone. Her experiences taught her that even in all the difficulties in life and the sufferings caused by the Plague, God is with us. We are all intertwined and protected by the great love of God. Jesus came to show us that love. Julian invented a word for this all-encompassing presence of God. She called it *Oneing*. Our souls rest in God’s soul. God’s soul rests in our souls and we are carried in God’s love throughout life.

I heard a story last week about an older man who lives in northern Vermont. He and his wife begin each day with a time of reflection and prayer before he takes a long morning walk. One morning not too long ago, he was walking down his favorite trail and felt a presence behind him. He thought it was an animal so he turned around to see. He didn’t see an animal. He saw a large glowing light that radiated all around him and stayed with him throughout the rest of his walk. He knew he was walking with the light of God.

This is what our scripture is teaching us today. As we walk through life listening for the story of God’s loving presence with us, we are held in God’s encompassing light. Jesus came to show us the way of God’s love and invite us to open our hearts to become people of love following his way.

May God be with us on the journey. Amen

© 2021, Susan Izard

First Church West Hartford
12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107