

PALM SUNDAY SERMON – APRIL 5, 2020

1. Every year on Palm Sunday, we enter into the passion of Jesus by recounting the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
 - a. We hear about the crowds who receive him with fanfare and adulation, proclaiming, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
 - b. As we recount this story, we're also faced with a question, a question which seemingly the whole city of Jerusalem is asking: "Who is this?"
2. Who *is* this?
 - a. It's a question that we've asked many times before, and it's a question that the Christian tradition has answered many times before.
 - b. This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.
 - c. This is the Messiah, God's chosen servant who is sent to restore Israel's fortunes and bless the nations.
 - d. This is God's Son, the one through whom the whole world is saved.
3. These many articulations of Jesus' identity express the fact that Jesus holds universal significance for all people, but his universal significance can never be exhausted in any one particular statement about his identity.
4. And so, as we find ourselves in new situations and facing new challenges, we may find ourselves asking the question anew: who is this?

5. This question takes on a new valence in our present moment.
 - a. We're facing the likes of a pandemic which most of us, maybe all of us, have never seen before.
 - b. This moment exposes our vulnerability and fragility as a species.
 - c. We're facing a challenge not from other people or nations but from the natural order itself, a challenge which threatens to fundamentally reconfigure life as we know it.
 - d. We spend our lives trying to immunize ourselves from these kinds of threats, and rightfully so.
6. In moments like this, it's natural to ask why. It's normal to wonder why such a mutation would even be allowed to take place.
 - a. There's nothing wrong with asking the question, but frankly, I don't think that we can find any satisfying answers for that question.
 - b. There's a moral, even theological, ambiguity to these natural processes, and this ambiguity defies our attempts to rationally explain what is going on.
 - c. Nevertheless, this ambiguity doesn't silence all of our attempts to speak about God, and perhaps the right question, the proper question to ask, is the one we posed earlier: who is this?
 - d. Who is Jesus in the midst of a pandemic?

7. Friends, Jesus is the one who has chosen to be with us, even in a time such as this.
 - a. In his incarnation, Jesus himself, that is to say, God took on our human vulnerability as God's own condition.
 - b. And this vulnerability reaches its highest expression in the events of Holy Week. By walking the way of the cross, Jesus reveals that God is present, that God is with us, in our fragility.
 - c. If the events of the week ahead tell us anything, they tell us to look for God in the most unexpected of places. They point us to the places that we're least likely to look.
 - d. The worldly logic of power tells us that we should be able to find God in pomp and circumstance, in acts of force and strength, but the story of Jesus' passion says: don't look there. Look here. Look at the cross. Look at the places where life is most fragile. There, you'll find God.
8. Just as Jesus wept for Jerusalem upon entering the city 2000 years ago, I imagine Jesus looking upon our locked-down cities right now and weeping.
 - a. But right now, Jesus is not just weeping for us; he's weeping with us.
 - b. This Holy Week, Jesus weeps with us because he understands the very condition we're in, and his tears are his resolve to stand with us as we navigate our way through the muck and mire of this crisis.

9. In these days, we may not be able to answer the question of why, but we can say that God has chosen to be with us, even in a time such as this.

- a. And as we seek relief from this global pandemic, it's an opportunity to acknowledge anew our fragility, to acknowledge that life is precious, that life is a gift given which we can only ever receive.
- b. In our finitude, we connect with what is most holy and sacred.
- c. Because God doesn't bring strength from strength. God brings strength out of weakness. God brings life out of death.

10. Friends, this Holy Week, may Jesus, the Christ, be your ever-present companion:

- a. May he go before you to lead you,
- b. Behind you to protect you,
- c. Beneath you to support you,
- d. And beside you to befriend you.
- e. Do not be afraid.
- f. May the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon you.
- g. Do not be afraid.
- h. Amen.