

## “The In-Breaking of God”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
*Palm Sunday [Processional]*

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

Mark 11:1-26

*‘The one who enters in the Lord’s name is blessed;  
we bless all of you from the Lord’s house.*

*The Lord is God! He has shined a light on us!’* *Psalm 118:26-27*

Let us pray, O God,

Break into our lives to shake us up & help us break out of old ways that don’t work.

Yet help us recognize how *you* have always been there for us to save us.

Amen

There is an obscure incident in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel

when King David was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem.

Just as the oxen pulling its cart, stumbled, a man named Uzzah

put out his hand to steady the Ark – and Uzzah was struck dead

because God had ‘broken forth’ upon him.

David was so upset with God for this, that he would not bring the Ark into the city.

However, after 3 months without incident,

the Ark was finally brought into Jerusalem and David danced to see it

[Our painting in the Narthex of David dancing, portrays this event].

So, God’s in-breaking can have some serious consequences.

The Hebrew word for this is “peretz”, or “perez”,

which means to “breach” or “burst forth”.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perez\\_%28son\\_of\\_Judah%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perez_%28son_of_Judah%29)

Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem also had some serious consequences. ...

Going back to Uzzah for a moment: I’ve wondered why God had it in for poor Uzzah, who seemed to be just trying to do the right thing.

This reminds me of a story about a fellow

who had a nice job, a loving family, and lived in a beautiful home.

He was a good man, a decent man.

Then one day, he lost his job, but he was a good man, a decent man and persevered through it.

Then his wife left him with the kids, the house burned down after that,

but through it all, he was a good man, a decent man and he persevered.

After various and sundry disasters, he finally climbed to the top of a mountain seeking answers, and he cried out, “Why me? Why me?”

Suddenly, clouds rolled across the sky and there was thunder and lightning, then the clouds parted and he heard a voice say,

“There’s something about your face that just ticks me off!”

That is not how God treats us! However, that is often how we treat each other...

Willard, p.2

Our God is about justice and healing;

and God's in-breaking into our world can have painful consequences;  
and our God was willing to share in what it means to be human.

Jesus' entry to Jerusalem had serious consequences for all concerned  
as he burst upon the scene, though initially received with joy.

The crowd that had been traveling with him from Jericho

must have made quite a spectacle as they cheered and waved palms for  
Jesus riding into town on a donkey.

The multitudes of pilgrims and inhabitants already in the city for the Passover,  
would quite naturally have wondered about this and joined in on the fun.

However, the next morning, Jesus provoked a different response  
when he returned to Jerusalem.

Entering the Temple, he proceeded to "power-wash" the situation  
by turning over tables and chairs, most likely with help from his disciples;

And though he disrupted the selling of sacrificial animals,  
at no time does the text say that Jesus harmed any person or animal.

But then he stops, and – presumably with the help of his disciples again,  
Jesus prevents people from leaving the Temple's outer courtyard,  
the Court of the Gentiles.

Jesus then confronts the crowd – not just to scold them, but to teach them,  
pointing out that they had turned their Temple into a marketplace.

These events – and Jesus' words threatened the delicate balance  
between the Jewish authorities and their Roman overlords.

The question is "Why would Jesus do this?"

The incident with the fig tree seems spiteful and out of character –

but the fig tree represents national character,  
and the tree's inability to bear fruit suggests it symbolized  
an unfulfilled expectation of the nation of Israel.

The Temple was also a symbol of Israel –

specifically, its history and relationship with God.

That relationship implied a responsibility to God

to be a light to the other nations of the world,  
to be a city on a hill as a visible example.

Jesus' disruption of the commerce of the Temple's outer courtyard  
was about unblocking access to what was inside.

Jesus was doing a "catheter-ization" to break up the blockage  
between God and people – for generations to come.

Willard, p.3

This would provoke the “single victim mechanism” of scapegoating, described by the high priest, Caiaphas, as,

“One person must die for the nation,  
so that the whole nation will not be destroyed.”

Jesus would bear the brunt of his enemies’ violence by being nailed to a cross, and this would set in motion a quest for human freedom – justice through compassion that is still in progress.

And so Holy Week begins today with Palm Sunday which we also observe as Passion Sunday [1<sup>st</sup> Slide]...

Jesus’ “passion” is made evident in these dramatic events which would likewise provoke fierce passions in other people, yet ultimately evoke com-*passion* for Jesus – the Son of God, when he was crucified.

The Passion story has been retold in the centuries ever since, represented in the life of the church through the observance of Maundy Thursday – recalling his Last Supper and Arrest, and of Good Friday – commemorating his Trial and Crucifixion.

Easter Day celebrates the transformation of the disciple’ despair to joy with the happy conclusion of Holy Week – Jesus’ Resurrection.

So, the Passion Narrative of Christ’s Gospel continues for us at UCC at The Villages with four services of worship this week.

Maundy Thursday [2<sup>nd</sup> Slide] will be different this year as we re-enact the Last Supper through a liturgical drama directed by Nancy Bell, followed by a solemn Holy Communion...

On Good Friday [3<sup>rd</sup> Slide], there will be a sequence of eleven stories told as a multimedia presentation with imagery, music, and silent reflection telling of Christ’s betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion...

Then, Easter Sunday morning begins with our Sunrise Service [4<sup>th</sup> Slide] as we celebrate the discovery of the empty tomb and greet the rising Sun...

Our 9:50 am Traditional Service [5<sup>th</sup> Slide] builds on the earlier service as we hear the stories of Jesus’ Resurrection and celebrate a joyful Holy Communion – so, I’m doing two sermons that day for those of you attending both services!

There’re many ways of telling the story through ritual, sermon, anthem and hymn, visual art, storytelling, and sacred dance – like our procession this morning.

Our readers for Good Friday and Easter will be using texts I have paraphrased for the purpose of hearing the Gospel stories in a new way –

but in whatever “package” the Good News of Christ comes in, the Gospel message alone still has the power to break in upon human hearts to disrupt and change the world.

Willard, p.4

Christ enters our lives not simply by us belonging to the right religion,  
or by doing the proper ritual, or being convinced in Bible study,  
or being “wowed” by a performance  
or overwhelmed by an emotional event like healing,  
but it is by what *you* need for that salvation to happen –  
which can be any or all of these things  
for the sake of opening up our hearts to love.

The same goes for human society as well as nations of the world –  
and even the Church itself needs to get shaken up and broken open,  
from time to time.

God can break us open, sometimes in painful ways, yet not without humor,  
helping us to find our story in the story of Christ –  
whom God did not spare from the challenges of being human.

The story of Christ is the story of the victim of injustice –  
and even Uzzah has a place in that story  
along with all martyrs, named and unnamed.

Ultimately, we have in Christ a defiant hope for this world  
that God affirms human identity, that evil is overcome by good, and  
that there is grace in this world as a foretaste of glory in the next,  
the time to come.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 is a hymn of thanksgiving to God;  
And this portion of the psalm celebrates the arrival of  
those who represent God in justice, mercy, and goodness...*

[1] Give thanks to the Lord because he is good,  
because his faithful love lasts forever.

[2] Let Israel say it:  
“God’s faithful love lasts forever!”

[19] Open the gates of righteousness for me  
so I can come in and give thanks to the Lord!

[20] This is the Lord’s gate;  
those who are righteous enter through it.

[21] I thank you because you answered me,  
because you were my saving help.

[22] The stone rejected by the builders  
is now the main foundation stone!

[23] This has happened because of the Lord;  
it is astounding in our sight!

[24] This is the day the Lord acted;  
we will rejoice and celebrate in it!

[25] Lord, please save us!  
Lord, please let us succeed!

[26] The one who enters in the Lord’s name is blessed;  
we bless all of you from the Lord’s house.

[27] The Lord is God!  
He has shined a light on us!

So lead the festival offering with ropes  
all the way to the horns of the altar.

[28] You are my God—I will give thanks to you!  
You are my God—I will lift you up high!

[29] Give thanks to the Lord because he is good,  
because his faithful love lasts forever.

Inspired by Mark 11:1-26

AND AS THEY APPROACHED JERUSALEM  
THROUGH BETHPAGE AND BETHANY, AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES,  
JESUS SENT TWO OF THE DISCIPLES AHEAD, SAYING,  
“GO INTO THE VILLAGE ACROSS FROM US, AND AS YOU ENTER IT,  
YOU WILL FIND A COLT TIED THERE  
UPON WHICH NO ONE HAS EVER RIDDEN;  
UNTIE IT AND BRING IT HERE.  
AND WHEN SOMEONE ASKS YOU,  
‘WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?’  
YOU SAY,  
‘THE ONE WHO IS CALLED “THE LORD”  
HAS NEED OF IT AND WILL SEND IT RIGHT BACK.’”

SO, THEY WENT AND FOUND A COLT TIED UP  
OUTSIDE OF A DOOR, OPENING TO THE STREET.  
AND AS THEY WERE UNTYING IT,  
SOMEONE FROM A GROUP STANDING NEARBY SAID TO THEM,  
“HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE, UNTYING THAT COLT?”  
AND THEY SAID ONLY WHAT JESUS HAD TOLD THEM TO SAY,  
SO THE GROUP LET THEM GO.

AND THEY BROUGHT THE COLT TO JESUS  
AND LAID THEIR CLOAKS ON IT FOR JESUS TO SIT UPON.  
THEN, A CROWD TOOK THEIR CLOAKS  
AND SPREAD THEM OUT ON THE ROAD AHEAD.  
SO, OTHERS CUT DOWN LEAFY BRANCHES FROM A FIELD  
AND DID THE SAME.

AND THOSE WHO LED THE WAY AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED, CHEERED,  
“HOSANNA! HOSANNA! HOSANNA! EMPOWER US!  
PRAISE TO THE ONE WHO IS COMING  
IN THE NAME OF THE ONE WHO IS GOD!  
PRAISE FOR THE BELOVED COMMUNITY  
THAT IS COMING ON BEHALF OF OUR ANCESTOR DAVID!  
HOSANNA! EMPOWER US TO GREATER HEIGHTS!”

SO, JESUS CAME TO JERUSALEM;  
AND ENTERING THE TEMPLE, HE OBSERVED EVERYTHING...  
WHEN IT WAS DAY'S END,  
HE DEPARTED FOR BETHANY WITH THE TWELVE DISCIPLES.

AND THE NEXT MORNING,  
HE WENT OUT FROM BETHANY WITHOUT EATING BREAKFAST.  
THEN, SEEING A FIG-TREE IN THE DISTANCE – WITH LEAVES,  
HE WENT TOWARDS IT.

HOWEVER,  
EVEN AFTER SEARCHING THROUGH IT WHEN HE GOT THERE,  
HE FOUND NOTHING BUT LEAVES –  
BECAUSE IT WAS STILL EARLY FOR FIGS.

YET, HE RESPONDED TO THIS BY SAYING,  
“NEVER AGAIN WILL THERE BE FRUIT TO EAT FROM YOU!”  
AND THE DISCIPLES HEARD THIS...

AND THEY CAME TO JERUSALEM;  
THEN, GOING INTO THE TEMPLE,  
JESUS STARTED TO DRIVE OUT  
THE SHOPKEEPERS AND THE SHOPPERS  
FROM THE TEMPLE'S OUTER COURTYARD.  
AND HE KNOCKED OVER THE TABLES OF THE MONEY-EXCHANGERS  
AND THE CHAIRS OF THOSE WHO PEDDLED  
'SACRIFICIAL DOVES'.

THEN, HE PREVENTED PEOPLE FROM LEAVING  
AS THEY WERE TRYING TO CARRY THEIR THINGS  
ACROSS THE TEMPLE'S PLAZA.  
AND HE TAUGHT THEM A LESSON...  
“IS IT NOT WRITTEN:  
'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED  
A HOME FOR ALL ETHNIC COMMUNITIES TO APPROACH ME'?  
BUT YOU HAVE TRANSFORMED IT INTO A HOLE FOR THIEVES!”

AND THE HIGH PRIESTS HEARD THIS;  
SO THEY BEGAN TO LOOK FOR A WAY TO RUIN HIM –  
ANY WAY THEY COULD.

AND PASSING BY THE FIG-TREE LATER THAT MORNING...  
THEY SAW THAT IT WAS DRIED UP, DOWN TO ITS ROOTS!  
AND REMEMBERING FROM BEFORE, PETER THE ROCK SAID TO HIM,  
“RABBI! THE FIG-TREE WHICH YOU CURSED – HAS DRIED UP!”

AND JESUS ANSWERED HIM,  
“TRUST GOD!  
I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH,  
WHOEVER SAYS TO THIS HILL,  
‘YOU WILL BE PICKED UP AND TOSSED INTO THE SEA !’  
AND DOES NOT DISPUTE THIS IN ONE’S OWN HEART,  
BUT BELIEVES IN WHAT ONESELF SAYS WILL HAPPEN,  
IT WILL BE SO.  
THROUGH THIS I AM TELLING ALL OF YOU WHO PRAY  
THAT WHEN YOU ASK FOR SOMETHING,  
EXPECT TO RECEIVE IT, AND YOU WILL.

AND WHEN YOU STAND TO LEAD PUBLIC PRAYER  
AND YOU HAVE A GRIEVANCE AGAINST SOMEONE,  
DO NOT MENTION IT  
JUST AS YOU HOPE YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN  
WILL FORGIVE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS.

BUT IF YOU DO NOT FORGIVE OTHERS,  
NEITHER WILL YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN FORGIVE YOU...’

Mark 11:1-26

11:1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Beth'phage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples,

2 and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it.

3 If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"

4 And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it.

5 And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"

6 And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. 7 And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it.

8 And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.

9 And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"

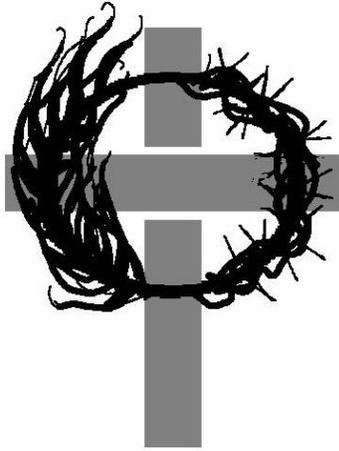
11 And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; 16 and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he taught, and said to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." 18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching. 19 And when evening came they[a] went out of the city.

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, "Master,[b] look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered." 22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received[c] it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

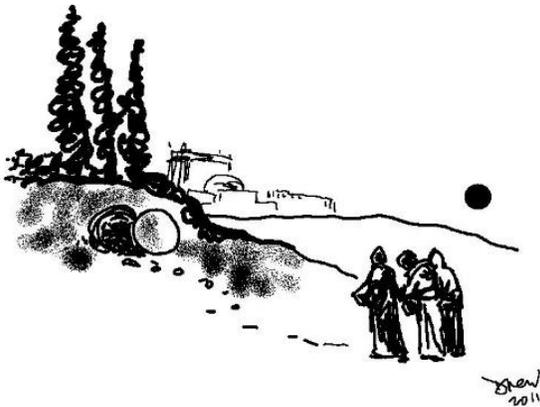
26 "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses"



*Stew  
2009*



*Stew  
2007*



*Stew  
2011*

