

“Lenten Advent”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL

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Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

Zechariah 9:9-17

Matthew 21:1-11

¹⁰ *When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked,
“Who can this be?”*

¹¹ *The crowd answered,
“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

Let us pray... O God,

Guard us from being swept up with the mob’s discontent;

But lead us on with confidence into a future of peace and prosperity

in the company of Christ and the multitudes of your Beloved Community.

Amen

In the Easter story, the ‘crowd’ has a bad reputation –
for being fickle.

On Palm Sunday, they are *cheering for* Jesus as he enters Jerusalem in triumph;
but by Good Friday, they are *jeering against* him,
while calling for the Romans to free Barabbas the terrorist instead.

In the 1960s, I remember my youth minister, Lori Witmer-Roberts,
showed us a set of abstract black & white prints of art smuggled out of
an Eastern Bloc country – one of the countries
under the domination of the Soviet Union at the time.

One of those prints showed Jesus riding on a donkey,
white-robed with his face in shadow, surrounded by a joyful crowd.

Lori said,

“Look at Jesus. He knows they are going to betray him.”

I think that is certainly true about mob mentality –
one minute, popular, and the next, everybody’s target.

That seems to be how supermarket tabloids work:

For example, the Kardashians are on the cover everywhere –
and then they are nowhere...

That kind of “message” says more about the audience
for whom such sensational stuff appeals, than it does about the person
who is alternately the object of adoration and of derision.

So, I find it is generally a mistake to even look at the covers of such magazines
while waiting in the supermarket checkout line – with one exception.

I regret not getting a copy of one tabloid that had a headline
which went something like this:

“Hillary Clinton caught in affair with gay extraterrestrial.”

Willard, p.2

Actually, they used the word, 'alien' – as in anxiety about immigrants,
as well as anxiety about gender-specific people,
politicians in general and women politicians in particular.

Most of us get this as a joke – a bad joke, but a joke just the same;
Yet for a longtime now, we have been fed a kind of tabloid journalism
on TV and the Internet that has been conditioning us;

Likewise, the media itself has been conditioned
to compete with each other in this style.

They are trying to keep up with each other for the latest scoop
to appease the public's appetite for low calorie misinformation.

Some forms of media have evolved into more and more extremes of 'reality TV' –
which seems to be anything but real, featuring staged 'survivor' scenarios
like lab experiments with people as test subjects.

Talk shows went from Phil Donohue being out there in the audience
with microphone in hand, discussing provocative themes,
to just being 'out there' like the phony truth-telling
of Jerry Springer refereeing fights onstage.

Now, even shock jock Howard Stern has been around long enough
to have earned a certain amount of respect
as a judge for a national TV talent show.

This is all OK as entertainment – if you get the joke,
and don't take things too seriously.

But the problem is that the general public too often doesn't get the joke –
especially when an individual's reality becomes more and more desperate.

Then, slick answers – which seem obvious, but are impractical,
are posed as quick fixes and very appealing in the short run.

So, crowds of desperate people become willing to be swayed
to blame someone or some group, by those who cherry-pick only those facts
that back up a narrative that serves their advantage.

Contemporary scholarship says that the crowd that calls for
Barabbas to be spared and Jesus to be crucified,
was not the same crowd that cheered Jesus' entry to Jerusalem.

It is possible that most of the Jewish people who came from out of town
to celebrate Passover would have been aware of the antagonism
that the religious authorities felt towards Jesus.

The word would certainly have been spread through those who were local
and active at the Temple.

Yet it is not clear that if these visitors would have been motivated
beyond curiosity to turn against Jesus.

Willard, p.3

According to John 11:55-57...

55 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.

56 They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple,

“What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?”

57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if any one knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Again, it is unlikely that a large crowd of outside visitors would have been aroused in the early morning with news of Jesus' arrest or even been permitted to gather at the Roman governor's mansion.

However, there were outsiders who were already with Jesus when he set out from Galilee and Samaria in the north and even more joined him when he came to Jericho, as it says in Mark 10:46^a...

And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude...

At the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus had sent out 72 missionaries ahead of him very specific instructions.

As it says in Luke 10:4-9, they were to:

4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.

5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’

6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you.

7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house.

8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

Jesus was not so charitable about towns that would not receive them, telling his apostles to scrape the dust of that town off their shoes, but still to tell them, ‘...the kingdom of God has come near.’

Willard, p.4

The 4th verse of Luke 10 has especially intrigued me;

Besides Jesus' instructions to... '*Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals*'
he then tells them, '*and salute no one on the road.*'

This suggests that he was planting seeds for communities of faith –
urging the apostles to keep their focus on the homes of people
living in the villages they would visit.

They were Jesus' vanguard – and not just the advance party for his entourage;
and their experience of success and failure,
would serve to guide future apostles to bring
the Good News of Jesus' life and teachings into the wider world.

The Season of Lent is like the Season of Advent, they are both seasons of preparation
and both include journeys – and hopeful arrivals, too!

In Advent, wise men of the East follow a star and the legend it represents,
to carry them across mountains and deserts.

Mary & Joseph are obligated to sojourn from Nazareth to Bethlehem
to be counted in a census, and where Mary's baby has come to term
and Jesus is born to begin his earthly journey.

The shepherds – upon seeing a vision of angels, venture in to Bethlehem
to find this baby that holds so much promise for humankind.

We have concluded the Season of Lent with Palm Sunday's commemoration
of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus' next journey would be the Way of the Cross.

In the Catholic tradition, this has been depicted as 14 Stations of The Cross, plus one,
for contemplation, which portray these events...

Pilate condemns Jesus to die after having him scourged with a whip

Jesus accepts his cross and picks it up

Jesus falls for the first time, weakened by his wounds

Jesus sees his mother, Mary

A man named Simon is forced to help carry the cross

A woman named Veronica wipes sweat and blood from Jesus' face

Jesus falls for the second time

Jesus speaks to three women of Jerusalem

Jesus falls for the third time

Jesus is stripped of his clothes at Golgotha

Jesus is nailed to the cross

Jesus dies on the cross

Jesus is taken down from the cross

Jesus is placed in the tomb

And the 15th station that was added is...

Resurrection

Willard, p.5

Jesus' journey to the Cross reflects our own *journey in life when the worst happens* and his story serves as a reminder to us that though we are mortal – and life sometimes gives us hard options, we have a companion on that road – and a promise for a 15th station of Resurrection, of rehabilitation, renewal, rebirth.

God has walked among us and when we have encountered God as Christians through being baptized as an infant or by choice as an adult, and raised in the Church going to Sunday school and being confirmed, or by not having any prior knowledge of the Church at all, but still meeting Christ through the example of Christians' kindness and the teachings of the Bible and Church tradition, or by some personal revelation to then seek baptism into the Church, then we join that journey to God that Christians make just as others have made before us and those who will follow us; and so, the journey continues...

Amen

Our lesson today from Zechariah 9:9-17 tells about a skilled, but humble king who will come to lead the people of God...

- ⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion. Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.
Look, your king will come to you. He is righteous and victorious.
He is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.
- ¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem.
The bow used in battle will be cut off; he will speak peace to the nations.
His rule will stretch from sea to sea,
and from the river to the ends of the earth.
- ¹¹ Moreover, by the blood of your covenant,
I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit.
- ¹² Return to the stronghold, prisoners of hope.
Moreover, declare today that I will return double to you.
- ¹³ Indeed, I myself will bend Judah as a bow; I will fill it with Ephraim.
Zion, I will rouse your sons against your sons.
Greece, I will make you like a warrior's sword.
- ¹⁴ The LORD will appear above them; his arrow will go forth like lightning.
The LORD God will blow the horn;
he will march forth on the stormy winds of the south.
- ¹⁵ The LORD of heavenly forces will protect them.
They will devour and subdue like sling stones.
They will drink, mumbling like one having wine.
They will be filled like a bowl, like the corners of the altar.
- ¹⁶ The LORD their God will deliver them on that day as the flock of his people;
they will be the jewels in a crown dotting his land.
- ¹⁷ What is his goodness, and what is his beauty?
Grain will make his young men flourish; so too wine his young women.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Matthew 21:1-11

- ¹When Jesus and his disciples came near Jerusalem,
he went to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives
and sent two of them on ahead. ² He told them,
“Go into the next village, where you will at once find a donkey and her colt.
Untie the two donkeys and bring them to me.
³ If anyone asks why you are doing that, just say,
“The Lord^[a] needs them.’ Right away he will let you have the donkeys.”
- ⁴ So God’s promise came true, just as the prophet had said,
⁵ “Announce to the people of Jerusalem:
‘Your king is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey.
He comes on the colt of a donkey.’”
- ⁶ The disciples left and did what Jesus had told them to do.
⁷ They brought the donkey and its colt and laid some clothes on their backs.
Then Jesus got on.
- ⁸ Many people spread clothes in the road,
while others put down branches which they had cut from trees.
- ⁹ Some people walked ahead of Jesus and others followed behind.
They were all shouting,
“Hooray for the Son of David!
God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hooray for God in heaven above!”
- ¹⁰ When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked,
“Who can this be?”
- ¹¹ The crowd answered,
“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”