First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

From Hosanna to Alleluia

3/24/24

Mark 11:1-11 - NRSV

1When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples **2**and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. **3**If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’ ” **4**They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, **5**some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” **6**They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. **7**Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. **8**Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. **9**Then, those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” 11Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

I’ll start out, today, by shamelessly plugging our Tuesday night Bible study. As I may have mentioned, we always study the text that I preach on each week, using various translations, and it has become something of a laboratory for me, where I get to test ideas and thoughts about where the sermon might go. The discussions are always rich and robust and inevitably I hear something that inspires me to look at scripture in a different light. And that certainly was the case this week.

We spent a good deal of time, this week, examining the subtleties of this passage, as a casual, surface level read, simply doesn’t answer some of the questions that a closer examination of this text raise. Questions like, “Why a colt?” “What, exactly, was the crowd expecting, when they witnessed Jesus entering the city?” And, maybe most importantly, “What shifted to cause the crowd to move from Hosanna, to Crucify Him, in a matter of a few short days?”

So, to answer the questions; Jesus entering Jerusalem on a colt, is a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

*T*he crowd expected Jesus to finally end the brutal 100-year Roman occupation, reestablishing the Kingdom of David and to rein as their earthly king. In describing why, the crowd turned against Jesus so quickly, Dong Hyeon Jeong Assistant Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Evanston, Illinois, writes that, *“The so-called triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem…is not triumphant at all.” “Among many other reasons, the procession is not fully triumphant because it lacks the finale of a royal, imperial, and even messianic procession during the time of Jesus.” “The procession should have ended with a grand ritual/sacrifice, expulsion of former vestiges of power, and/or even a banquet celebration. None of them happened.”* So, it was unfulfilled expectations; disappointment in not getting what they had long hoped for, that caused the crowd to turn.

I think Jesus must have known that this would ultimately be the reaction of the crowd, just as he knew that coming to Jerusalem at all, would result in his death. He could have skipped the hoopla and slipped into the city unnoticed. But, knowing exactly what awaited him, he went anyway.

That said, there’s an element of the subversive at play here. Jesus entering the city on a colt stands in sharp contrast to Harrods regular entrances into Jerusalem. The Romans had established their capital at Caesarea, and while Jerusalem remained the religious center of Israel, during the occupation, the political center was at Caesarea. Harrod made regular visits to Jerusalem, primarily during the various festivals, to remind people just who ran things. So, whenever he came to the Holy City, it was on war horses, with a full regiment of Roman soldiers, dressed in armor and armed with weapons.

There was no armed retinue, no white stallion, no attempt to claim the throne of David, and yet the very act of entering Jerusalem in the way Jesus did, was subversive because it made it clear that Jesus stood on the side of the oppressed. That, obviously, was a threat to the Roman occupiers. And the lack of a royal finale; the disappointment that the crowd felt when they realized Jesus wasn’t going to physically overthrow the government of the Roman occupiers, only added to an already chaotic and volatile situation.

We all know what happens next. We all know that Jesus’ death is imminent and we also know that Alleluias are not far off. We know this not because we were there, but because our faith tells us so. And that raises a question: Is the faith we profess; the faith we practice, the revolutionary, subversive kind that Jesus demonstrated on that first Palm Sunday? Or is it a polite, lukewarm faith that doesn’t make waves, or cause any problems.

In a world where the gap between the haves and the have-nots grows wider each day, the message of the gospel is more relevant now than ever before. Standing with the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized and the powerless, has become even more important than ever and is an increasingly a revolutionary and subversive act.

Rather than being a headlight, illuminating the way towards a more just society for all of God’s creation, the church has become a taillight, allowing the most negative and divisive elements of our society to take the steering wheel.

We see governments siding more and more with corporations and against those who are in need of food, housing, and justice of all sorts. And, unfortunately, in some corners of the Christian church, we see those who profess a belief in the teachings of Jesus acquiesce to these trends, at best, while other Christians actively support corporate greed over the needs of God’s children.

When the church becomes more concerned with wealth and power, when the church bows down to the government instead of living into the message that Jesus taught, and was crucified for, then the church has lost its moral compass.

Faith is not meant to be lukewarm or even polite. It shouldn’t be something that we put on each Sunday morning for an hour or so and then put back on the shelf to await the following week. Faith is meant to be a foundation, giving us the strength and courage to challenge the status quo, to take risks in the service of the gospel, to be revolutionary and subversive, even if it means that everyone around us cries for our crucifixion.

 God calls us to put our faith into action in the most revolutionary and subversive way possible, in order to bring about the Kingdom. What that looks like may be different for you than it is for me. Perhaps God is calling you to work for environmental justice. Perhaps you have a calling to end food insecurity. Perhaps ending homelessness is where the Spirit is leading you. Whatever you feel called to do to make this world a better place, by living out the gospel, go all in. Don’t hesitate, and for heaven’s sake don’t be lukewarm about the work, because God does not call us to be lukewarm Christians.

As we enter Holy Week, as we move from Hosanna to Alleluia, take time to connect with, and listen to God. Find out what revolutionary and subversive thing God is calling you to do in order to further the message of Jesus and then go out and do it. AMEN