

The Children Are Pleading
Palm/Passion Sunday 2019

Rev. Sarah Campbell

Luke 19:28-48

Did you feel it? How the Palm Sunday story changes suddenly? It's as if heavy clouds have moved in. This part of the story, if it's told honestly, is for adults. It's for us. We need to protect the children. And so the children have left the sanctuary and are experiencing their own chapel time this morning.

Let us, adults, re-enter our Bible story.

Jesus, the pioneer of our faith, the ground breaker, the trail blazer, has been everywhere in the countryside, in the towns, in the small cities, teaching, inciting hope, and healing. Remember the healing stories and about Jesus? Remember his eyes? How, even when a crowd gathers around him, he clearly sees the one at the margins, the suffering one... He lasers in on that human being with his compassionate eyes, recognizing that they are hurting and that they need healing. Day after day he and his friends would move from town to town bringing God's dream of hope and healing to the people. The news of his power to do good spread. And his passion for doing good grew and so he began the journey to the biggest city of all, where he could do the most good. Jerusalem was the holiest place on earth for his people. It had also become the seat of political and economic power, where the powers that be organized the life of the people, with laws, taxes, regulations, incentives. The imperial powers "enlisted" the religious authorities and they worked together insuring a kind of peace, Pax Romana. Jesus knew that to address the root cause of much of the suffering of the people, he would have to go to the center of power and confront it head on.

And in a brilliantly orchestrated satirical public prophetic act, king Jesus rides into the metropolis in a parade amidst a mass of cheering people, he rides not on a high horse, but on a humble donkey. This was to be a different kind of kingdom.

"He was now approaching the path down from the Mt. of Olives" it is written... "As he came near and saw the city... he wept over it." This is one of the most stunning sentences in the Bible. **As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it.**

Jesus saw the truth clearly. He was not distracted. And he was grounded in centering prayer. God was in his head and in his understanding. God was in his eyes and in his looking. God was in his heart and in his thinking. It was not the empire that shaped, or distorted, how he perceived the city laid out in front of him. He saw the plight of humanity clearly. He

recognized the truth of all of it then and there. How far the people had strayed from God's intended good creation; how greed and fear had become the defacto city planners, distorting the shape of what could have been the city of God. What others saw as normal (the empire had woven a spell upon the people, making it all seem normal) he recognized as corrupt and the cause of impending doom. He had heard stories about Jerusalem, about what was happening as more people moved there, the concentration of wealth, the spread of poverty, and the sophisticated brutality that held this unnatural state of affairs together, but to see it all right there in front of him, with his own eyes, moved him so deeply...

That he wept. He weeps over the city. He weeps and convulsively sobs with such depth of sorrow these words: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace and justice. But now they are hidden from your eyes!" He wept because of what he saw and because he knew it didn't have to be this way.

Let us go now, in our imagination, to this place, where we can see the truth. Let us open our eyes, free ourselves from the distractions, the onslaught of information, and from the ever so subtle mind control of big money with their billboards, tv commercials, and now algorithms and pop up adds... Let us free ourselves from what we've come to think as normal, conformed to this world, and from denial, and from dangerous ignorance... You'll need to summon courage to do this... And let us look at what is in front of us--oh God be in our eyes and in our looking--and recognize the things that make for peace, for justice, for life!

Are you with me now? On this Palm Sunday, let us come near and see the city laid out before us. Let us not avert our eyes. Nor let our eyes cloud over in order to protect our heart. Let us see the truth. Do you dare? I think we must. In that city scape before us, that concentrated vista of humanity, so many scenes our eyes could be drawn to but I submit on this Palm Sunday in the year of 2019 that our eyes must zoom in on the children and the youth who are trying, oh how hard they are trying, to get our attention! "Over here! Look here!" The youth are gathering in cities all over our land and cities all over the earth, pleading for us, for adults, for those who can vote, for those with political power, to see them, to hear them, to feel them. Do we dare pay attention? They are making themselves known by the thousands in protests everywhere. They are saying: *This is real. This is now. Wake up adults. You are supposed to take care of us. Why in God's name won't you take care of us?*

Do we dare see the signs at the gun violence prevention protests? "Fear has no place in schools." "Don't shoot." "I should be writing my college essay. Not my will."

Do we dare listen to their speeches? "Mass shootings in the US have tripled since 2011." "America, 13 killed in Columbine in 1999 and still you do nothing. 27 killed at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012 and still you do nothing. 32 killed at Virginia Tech and still you do nothing. 17 killed at Stoneman Douglas Highschool and still you do nothing. What's wrong with you? Look at New Zealand, how swiftly they move to protect their children."

And across the planet, this Spring, the youth are pouring into the streets of every city of course they are!, they are full of life!, pleading for adults to wake up to the urgency of climate change. Do we dare see the messages in big bold letters on their signs: “Don’t burn my future.” “We can’t vote, but we deserve a say! Put our planet first!” “Our future is in your hands.”

Do we dare listen to their speeches? 16 year old Greta from Sweden told the business leaders at Davos: “Your financial success has come with an unthinkable price tag for the planet.” “We must meet the goals determined by climate experts if the planet is to be kept from crossing the tipping point where global warming spins out of control.” “The UN warns that we have only 12 years, (*only 12 years*) to limit climate change catastrophe.” “We are in the 11th hour. It’s a time of great peril and also of great promise. Because it’s entirely doable! We have everything we need to power the planet—sun, wind, water, geo thermal. And it’s even more economical than fossil fuels. We just need the political will and we need it fast.”

Do you see them? Do you hear them? The children. The youth. Do I? And let us do one more thing, we must, let us look at their faces, meditate on their tender, young, beautiful faces... lit up with excitement for the adventure of life..... Too many young faces though, now, are clouded over with, oh God let it not be despair*, but rather with deep concern for their future. Look at their faces filled with concern...

Let us look and see and recognize the truth of right now, our time, our place, our Jerusalem. Our children. Let us open our hearts to the truth of it all.

Let us weep.

“Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there...’My house, (my earth), shall be a place of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers!’”

Jesus weeps. He is fully in touch with his body, with God. All denial has been exorcised. He fully understands the immensity and urgency and gravity of the reality in front of him. What does he do? He does not back away. He does not return to the countryside and content himself with the smaller things. No. He weeps... and then his eyes sharpen/clarify with conviction and he stands up tall, mountain pose, and filled with God’s power and hope he goes forward into the center of it all and performs a bold, not impulsive but well-crafted act of non-violent resistance that disrupts the entire narrative of empire and breaks open the consciousness of the people, waking them up to what is possible in this world. No one is physically hurt. But this powerful action of turning over the tables of the money changers, creates such tension, remember this was a major holiday, the streets were filled, that the powers feel threatened. As well they should. “And the people are spellbound.”

Weeping does not have the last word in our Palm Sunday story. Powerful action has the last word. On this day Jesus is not a gentle shepherd. He is a zealot for the kingdom of God.

The time has come for us to act boldly, to disrupt business as usual, to overturn the table of the money changers through skillful organizing. Enbridge, you a Canadian corporation, have spent the most on lobbying in our state this year. Exxon, you've been intentionally confusing the message about climate change for over 30 years. You've known all along. Remington, you've filed for bankruptcy. NRA, you seem to be getting only more desperate. You must know your rule is ending. The time has come for us to reclaim the narrative of life, of what is possible, of what is God's dream. The time has come to unmask the narrative of empire and big money. And if you are wondering how, and that it all seems too big or complicated, tune in to the organizing that this church does with its powerful faith partners. Tune in and then show up. In the days to come, your body, your courage and your hope will be summoned.

Our children are pleading with us. This is not their work to do. It's ours. If we waited until these young activists were lawmakers, it would be too late for some children somewhere in our country, the only country that allows school massacres.... And it would be too late for the earth... It's on us. Jesus, the pioneer of our faith, the ground breaker, the trail blazer, was a zealot for God's dream. So, let us be zealots, non-violent, but courageous and clear and smart. Big... Bold...Action.... Now!! Our children's lives are at stake!

Prayer

Oh God,

Keep us grounded in your peace, but let us not be afraid to go now into the raging storm, into places of power, for the sake of your children. We remember them unto you, Oh God, the children of the earth, the children in our lives, the children in places of peril on this planet the children we name now aloud or in the silence of our hearts...

The children whom we will do almost anything for ...

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Oh God,

We remember unto you this day, those whom we love who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit; those who seek healing, those who grieve... we hold them in your healing light, those whom we name now in silence or aloud.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Oh God,

We speak unto you our words of gratitude on this day for the many blessings in our lives... We are grateful for the zealous prophets in human history with passion for your kingdom come on earth, the passion they lived for and sometimes even died for; grateful especially on this day for the pioneer of our faith, Jesus; and grateful for the prophets and prophetic communities in our time, those who dare to turn over the table of the money changers, those who dare to organize for your kingdom come on earth; and grateful for the children of the earth, for their excitement at being alive and their hope for the future.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us join our voices in saying the prayer our brother Jesus taught: Our creator....

*...We heard a few Sundays ago in the chapel from a speaker, that for whatever reason or constellation of reasons, there has been a dramatic rise in depression and suicide attempts and completed suicides since 2010 among American teens from every background.

Sources

Aslan, Reza, Zealot, The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth, Random House, 2013.

Borg, Marcus, and John Dominic Crossan, The Last Week, HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Craddock, Fred, Luke, John Knox Press, 1999.

Other notes:

The world's leading climate scientists have warned there is only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

The authors of the landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released on Monday say urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to reach the target, which they say is affordable and feasible although it lies at the most ambitious end of the [Paris agreement](#) pledge to keep temperatures between 1.5C and 2C.

The half-degree difference could also prevent corals from being completely eradicated and ease pressure on the Arctic, according to the 1.5C study, which was launched after approval at a final plenary of all 195 countries in Incheon in South Korea that saw delegates hugging one another, with some in tears. Guardian.

More Americans have died from guns than died in all the wars in American history.