Disruption of our orderly world

Read

This week’s reading from the Gospels...from the Voice Translation:

After a great parade, Jesus and His disciples walk into the temple area, and what He sees enrages Him. He sees moneychangers, buying and selling. He sees men sitting on benches, hawking doves to those who have come from the countryside to make a sacrifice. He sees that the salesmen and teachers have turned a sanctuary of worship into a place of spiritual prostitution. This is the place where Jesus came as a boy to sit with the great teachers. It is the place where His Father receives the offerings of His people. It is more than Jesus can take.

Can anyone be surprised at this other side to Jesus? He has turned out to be not just a kindly teacher; instead, He is the Anointed One, not to be taken lightly. In the midst of this scene filled with joy and chaos, there are extremes. Some are beginning to understand who this man from Galilee is — the Anointed — but the rulers are having great difficulty with the disruption to their orderly world.

Jesus, the disciples, and the great crowds were heading toward Jerusalem when they came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus stopped and beckoned to two of the disciples.

**Jesus:** Go to the village over there. There you’ll find a donkey tied to a post and a foal beside it. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone tries to stop you, then tell him, “The Master needs these,” and he will send the donkey and foal immediately.

He sent the disciples on ahead so His entry into Jerusalem could fulfill what the prophet Zechariah had long since foretold:

Tell this to Zion’s daughter,
“Look — your King is approaching,
seated humbly on a donkey,
a young foal, a beast of burden.”

So the disciples went off and followed Jesus’ instructions. They brought the donkey and foal to Jesus, they spread their cloaks on the animals, and Jesus sat down on them. The great crowd followed suit, laying their cloaks on the road.
Others cut leafy branches from the trees and scattered those before Jesus. And the crowds went before Jesus, walked alongside Him, and processed behind — all singing.

_Crowd:_ Hosanna, praises to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Eternal One! Hosanna in the highest!

The way Jesus enters the city on a lowly donkey, with crowds surrounding Him singing praises, surprises many within Jerusalem.

And that is how Jesus came into Jerusalem. The people noticed this strange parade. They wondered who this could be, this humble bearded man on a donkey who incited such songs.

_Crowd:_ This is Jesus, the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.

Jesus came to the temple. He drove out all those who were buying and selling. He upended the moneychangers’ tables and the dove-sellers’ benches.

_Jesus:_ It is written, “My house will be a house of prayer for all people,” but you have turned this house of prayer into a den of robbers.

Then the blind and the lame came to the temple, and Jesus healed them. Rings of children circled round and sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” But the priests and scribes didn’t understand.

When they saw the upturned tables, the walking paralytics, and the singing children, they were shocked, indignant, and angry, and they did not understand.

_Priests and Scribes:_ Do you hear what these children are saying?

_Jesus:_ Yes. Haven’t you read your own psalter? “From the mouths and souls of infants and toddlers, the most innocent, You have decreed praises for Yourself.”

At that, Jesus left Jerusalem. He went to Bethany, where He spent the night.

_Matthew 21.1-18 | VOICE_

Reflect

Palm Sunday.
Holy Monday.
Holy Tuesday.
Spy Wednesday.
Maundy Thursday.
Good Friday.
Black Saturday.
Easter Sunday.

It’s the procession of Holy Week – marked more intentionally in high churched, liturgical traditions, but among the more evangelical among us, we typically only pay attention to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter. In this year of global pandemic and lockdown, we have the great anomaly of a near void of public celebrations.

Which is why we’re making space for this special edition of Still Waters: Weekend
Reflections. Up to this point, Still Waters has been a bit of change up – a conversational engagement with the Gospel reading track in the common lectionary as we make space for honest talk about the Greatest Story ever told – because we may not be able to congregate locally, but we can still read from the same lectionary globally. For the next two weeks – and probably beyond that for as long as this lockdown continues – Still Waters will be more monologue – with the aim still being honest talk about the Greatest Story ever told.

So here goes.

The Gospel reading for Holy Week commencing with Palm Sunday is Matthew 21.1-11 – which I took the liberty of expanding to 21.1-18 because, well, I can, and because it actually fits rather well. Matthew 21.1-11 is our Palm Sunday text (surprise!). Palm Sunday is normally a moment for loud celebratory anthems and many shouted ‘hosannas’ typically featuring a parade of children, waved palm branches, and perhaps a donkey.

As I read the text in the Voice Translation, the prefaced comments nailed it when it came to the true pathos of this moment in the Story. Yes, the children were shouting “hosanna to the Son of David” no doubt following the example of ecstatic parents along the impromptu parade route we now know as the Triumphal Entry. Jesus’ disciples were no doubt equally caught up in the euphoria. But that’s where the celebration pretty much stopped.

Palm Sunday wasn’t a celebration for the city at large or for the religious authorities nervously eyeing the jubilant crowds. For them this wasn’t an innocent celebration: it was a crowd in political heat frothing in religious fervor over the arrival of the latest Messiah-come-lately. As the preface in the Voice Translation captures it so aptly this was a “great disruption of their orderly world.”

There’s the original experience, the deeper pathos of Palm Sunday the first time around: **disruption**. The ordered world was overturned as effectively as the merchant tables in the temple courtyards – which is why I included those verses in the reading. The normal routine, the status quo, the way things are is suddenly upended leaving some ecstatic with anticipation and the rest quivering in uncertainty.

Who is this?
What’s happening?
Where will all this lead?
Will this city ever be the same again if this is, at last, the revolution against Rome?

We may not have the opportunity for public gatherings as we practice social distancing, but what we do have is the opportunity during this Holy Week to personally experience more of the pathos of the first Holy Week. The disruption of our lives – topped off with a bonus earthquake here locally – has many ready to break out the palm branches of kingdom come as we expect the Rapture to imminently occur granting us an immediate exit, stage right (or is it left?). The rest of us are mostly just groaning under the weight of uncertainty.

What is happening?
Where will this all lead?
Will this country ever be the same again?

Welcome to Holy Week, first century edition. No, not the literal donkey and the literal temple and the literal tables in the courtyard, but the same primal uncertainties that plagued everyone through that first Holy Week. That’s what we get this year, as a global exercise – as we all simultaneously enjoy the ultimate Lenten Season. What are you giving up for Lent this year? we ask each other. This year it’s simple: we are giving up **everything**.

Our temptation will be to rush to the certainties which we have been privileged to
celebrate during every Easter season for the simple reason we already know how that story ended. And sure, we can fan our present unfolding story with a large palm branch as we shout our own “God wins!” hosannas as we sit alone in our homes awaiting Rapture. But the fact is we don’t know how this story will end. This year we have the opportunity to lean into the uncertainty, holding our own hopes in tension with the disruption of our oh-so-orderly world.

And we have the opportunity to remember that Palm Sunday wasn’t a celebration for Jesus, either. Sure, the joy was contagious and he said that even the rocks were going to join the choir – but remember that the one visible emotion of Jesus was deep lament as he wept over the city before him.11 Jesus knew the loud hosannas masked the tragic destiny about to unfold for that city. And he knew too well the vale of tears he personally would have to navigate as he approached the ultimate disruption in his own destiny.

It’s Palm Sunday. Embrace the disruption.

Relate

What are the most significant disruptions you’ve personally been experiencing in this season? How have you been navigating these disruptions? How are you handling the uncertainties of this hour? How does Palm Sunday and Holy Week fit into all of this for you?

Respond

Lord, teach me how to embrace the disruptions that you, that Life, bring. Let me not seek to get out of anything prematurely, nor to medicate with palm branches – or visions of sugar plums, for that matter.

Let me feel it. Let me feel you in it.

Come, Lord Jesus, in this Holy Week. Let me watch for you in unexpected places…

11 Luke 21.41-44