

Jordan Station United Church

Sunday April 5, 2020 - Palm Sunday

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "I've Got High Hopes!"

(Matthew 21:1-11)

Today we celebrate the Palm Parade and begin our Holy week journey that will lead us to Easter. Today, like many of you, I missed the parade. I missed the smiling faces of our young people waving their palm branches madly and asking what the parade is for. I miss the sound of Joyce playing the organ, the choir singing and a party breaking out in our otherwise quiet sanctuary. I miss the sanctuary too and the sacredness that I feel every time I enter the space. I miss being the first one to arrive and turn on the lights. I miss turning on the stained-glass window that sits above the choir loft. I miss the scripture running through my head... ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. (Luke 24:30-31) I miss all of you and the profound impact you have on my life and ministry each week. But that being said, we are finding new and different ways to connect. New and different ways to offer you The Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Care.

Matthew's Gospel story today, tell us of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as he descends from the Mount of Olives. You know it is a big deal when it is recorded in great length in all four Gospels. We need not worry though that today we don't have actual palm branches to wave because that version of the story comes from John's Gospel. Matthew story that we heard today, tells us that a "very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road." Matthew (21:9).

As early as the fourth century, palms were used in services held in Jerusalem to commemorate Jesus' triumphal entry into the Holy City. Through the years, the custom spread to the Western church and today we had planned to carry on the tradition. Funny we never really picked up on the spreading of cloaks so today, I encourage you to do that in honour of Jesus' arrival. To spread your cloaks on your living room floor as a symbol of preparing for Jesus' arrival.

But as much as we love a parade, we need to fasten our seat belts folks! Holy week is about to begin and we are in for extreme turbulence on the final leg of our journey with Jesus, as we go straight through the darkness and death of the cross this week to the extreme joy of Resurrection next Sunday.

My hope for today, is that since we are unable to be together physically as a community of faith, that this year you make the journey personal. That you take the time that you never had before to experience the beauty of Holy Week. I have high hopes for this time in the church. I have high hopes that despite practicing physical distancing we will witness Jesus death and resurrection as the ultimate symbol of hope.

Our Moderator, Richard Bott has been pre-taping his Sunday services on Tuesday each week and I have been enjoying the gift of participating in worship. When you spend each week planning, preparing and executing worship, you rarely have an opportunity to worship so this has been a blessing. During his sermon, Richard talked about having high hopes for this season of Easter. I couldn't help but start singing that tune. You know the one...

"But he's got high hopes, he's got high hopes
He's got high apple pie, in the sky hopes..."

It stuck with me for the entire service and for the hours and days that have followed. When I looked up the words, I was reminded that it was made famous by Frank Sinatra in the 1959 film, "A Hole in the Head". Frank sang it along with child actor Eddie Hodges and it was nominated for a Grammy and won an Oscar for Best Original Song at the 32nd Academy Awards. It was so popular that John F. Kennedy changed the words to it during his Presidential run in 1960.

"Everyone is voting for Jack
Cause he's got what all the rest lack
Everyone wants to back -- Jack
Jack is on the right track."



For the life of me, I couldn't get his tune out of my head. To be honest, it began to grate on my nervous. I certainly did NOT have high hopes this week. I felt like many of you. Sometimes feeling sad, sometimes mad...the rest of the time, a combination of the two...basically smad! And on top of that, I couldn't remember all the words. So, I looked them up and kerplunk it hit me. It was God trying to breakthrough my feelings of despair and sorrow and replace them with feelings hope and joy. The lyrics could act as a mantra for this time of global pandemic. A prayer of hope as we take our first steps towards the Cross.

"Next time your found, with your chin on the ground
There's a lot to be learned, so look around
Just what makes that little old ant
Think he'll move that rubber tree plant
Anyone knows an ant, can't
Move a rubber tree plant"

We stand at a time in history when most of us have our chins on the ground. When the learning curve is so steep, we wake up every day thinking how on earth are we going to move this giant rubber tree plant even so much as an inch? We feel like a bunch of tiny ants who can't possibly move such a thing so big and scary. We can't possibly beat Covid-19!

"But he's got high hopes, he's got high hopes
He's got high apple pie, in the sky hopes."

But we have God on our side. We have Jesus leading the way down the scariest road ever imaginable. We have Jesus bearing the burden of the cross for us. Jesus had high hopes as he come near Jerusalem and said to his two disciples "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. Most scholars believe that it was James and John who were sent into town to get the donkey. Just days before it was James and John who said to Jesus "grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in all your glory." So much for a position of power and influence. So much for flanking Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, now they were being sent on an errand to find a donkey. Suddenly thrust into the role of being an essential front-line worker. Taking carry of the donkey detail!

Jesus had high hopes that the disciples would follow his command and that the owner would hand them over just because Jesus needs them. I love the simplicity of this story; I love that the great triumphant processional of Jesus coming into Jerusalem begins by two disciples going out to find a simple donkey. To barter with a donkey trader to help secure the transportation that he needs. It was a donkey after all, it is likely that the scribes used the word colt to make the entrance sound grander than it really was. They likely took poetic license in their retelling of the story. In John's version, Jesus actually **walks** into town and the donkey comes in much later. It is in the chaos of the cheering crowd and the waving of tree branches that Jesus is having trouble progressing forward. Jesus grabs a donkey that is in the crowd as if to remind people that he is not the King that everyone expected. Jesus is always doing the unexpected right. No one thought that he would come riding in on the back of a donkey and yet here he is.

Our role as followers of Jesus is similar. To do the unexpected. The disciples prepare the way for the King of Glory. Jesus is the one to preach, to heal and to cast out the sins of the world. Our job as disciples is to feed, cloth, visit and pray for the world. We are called to the simple and mundane tasks. But how do we do that when we are called to STAY HOME. Many of us care for others in the doing, until now. We delivered flowers, cards, shortbread cookies or cherry cheesecake to a friend who is sad. Many of us are called to visit our friends when they are in hospital, long term care facilities and hospice. But how do we do that and honour the call to STAY HOME. Perhaps we are called to embrace the old tradition of writing letters and sending cards to those in our community who have lost a loved one or who's health has been compromised. We are certainly called to pick up the telephone. You remember the telephone. The one that we are now surprised when it rings because we have built a wall around ourselves that only allows messages to

come in via text or email. Don't get me wrong, those are important and good but nothing beats the sound of a caring voice on the other end of the phone.

We are most certainly called to pray. And pray. And pray some more. I believe that we are called in time not to save the world, we will leave that up to Jesus. We are called to minister to one person at a time, one day at a time. I truly believe that if every one person just takes care of one person during this pandemic, then none of us will feel alone.

This is the way that we can prepare the way for Jesus to enter into people's lives. We need to be like James and John and do the things to prepare the way before Jesus can make his entry into Jerusalem and ultimately into the world. It is in the ordinary that the extraordinary can be found. I encourage you this week to reach out to just one person. Not the people who you already talk to but prayerfully consider who is the person in your life who needs it the most. The senior living in a long-term care facility who can't have visitors. A young girl who is pregnant and afraid. Some one who must go to the hospital daily for cancer treatments. The young man who has lost his job and can't afford his rent or food. It is in these humble acts that we can follow Jesus example. This is the week that the promise of hope will be fulfilled. The "king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.

"So, any time your gettin' low
'Stead of lettin' go
Just remember that ant
Oops there goes another rubber tree plant"

We are going to get low. We know that things are going to get worse before they get better but we hear it over and over. If we stand together, work together, persevere together, then we can overcome. We have to have high hopes. We have to sing He's got high hopes. We have to sing and shout:

"Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Thanks be to God. Amen