

Sermon: Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025

A. Mumgaard

Good Morning

Name -Annie Mumgaard, member of Bethlehem since I was 14 – parents Mary & Milo moved us out of town! ...when Curtis and I moved back in the 90s, wanted a church home, especially as we started our family. I taught SS for years and had so much fun. My mom used to say she thought I had kids so I could still play – name me a better a reason??!

One reason I taught SS was because I wanted my children to have an anchor. I had been given the anchor of following Jesus when I was very young. I did not know that – I look back at my SS days as being very fun with 3 of my best friends.

Yet, after living life, and experiencing so many ups and downs and days of loneliness and happiness and grief and lost-ness, within all that I at some point realized that what I got in my days in SS was a stabilizing anchor...an anchor that I left and came back to several times and questioned and questioned and still question...and that was all ok. Even good. So that's was my goal in teaching SS. Revealing our Anchor for questioning, path choosing, and life.

I didn't really want to sign up for giving today's sermon. I've done them a few times so this isn't my first rodeo. My daughter Sophia has a poster that says. "I didn't realize I was supposed to know how to do everything by my second rodeo.

Seems like a very low amount of rodeos. “ That’s how I find sermons - terribly difficult to do – always feels like my first rodeo. Yet, my friend Virg encouraged me to do today’s sermon because she said, I quote “you’re so good at Sunday School – this is a good Sunday school kind of day.”

Buckle up.

And yet – don’t worry. I will not ask you to speak. I will not ask you to move out of your seat. I do hope you will participate with the few SS type lessons we will cover in the next few minutes.

HAVE FOLKS WRITE 3-5 PEOPLE THEY LOVE ON CONNECTING PALM LEAVES...INITIALS/PET NAMES ENCOURAGED

So it’s Palm Sunday. The day we get to start church outside. It’s the day we used to have the kids use bright chalk and write all over the sidewalk – pure joy. So Let’s raise our palms again , our palms on which we have written the names of those we love most and pray for and will work hard to do anything for them, and want them to have and know they are a blessed child of God and have the anchoring love of Jesus in their lives – and raise that palm prayer high – and wave Jesus in.....Hosanna!! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! We are greeting our Redeemer King!!

How many years have some of you waved palms on a Palm Sunday? I’m probably up to 50ish...given my age and all the years I chose not to be in the church.

Well – we are a group of radical protesters. Yes my friends, you just now, are recreating an original protest.

Protests erupt when people are not and need to be heard, People hold signs (palm leaves) People yell their needs and desires (Hosanna!) And as far as protest go, this protest was very successful.

Context – and this comes from a conversation I had with Pastor Kris.

This biblical day we celebrate today happened within a very politically charged time. And Jerusalem was the center of it – a real tinderbox moment. Jesus knew this. And he knew it was not going to go well. He even wept – as we see in this Gospel. Oh to be so human that you weep because you KNOW that it is not going to go well, that the people, like us as our gospel says, we truly do not know the things that make for peace, and the city and all within are going to be crushed because we did not recognize the time of our visitation from God.

By the time Luke wrote this all down, the temple had been destroyed. In less than a lifetime.

We, the people, did not want a visitation from God. We wanted a King.

So why was Jesus setting off this politically charged tinderbox by riding into town on a donkey? Because the people, we, are waving our palms and saying we want a king. We were protesting and stating our desires!

O.K. – some King context.

As I understand it...Rome was in power with an emperor. Not a king – an emperor. There's a difference – I looked it up...according to Google AI: the key difference between an emperor and a king lies in the scope of their rule. A king typically rules a single kingdom, while an emperor rules over a larger territory, often encompassing multiple kingdoms or nations, forming an empire. Emperors are generally considered to be the highest political authority, whereas kings are often subordinate within an empire.

Within this arrangement the Pharisees, religious leaders, were gaining power because they were having folks follow the rules, not make waves, so all could “get along” and not make life worse for themselves and their people they were allowed to lead in their own religious ruled ways, that involved prestige and power...they did not want to get Rome mad.

And then you had in the mix some Zealots who wanted a revolution – they were ready to make change happen, probably violent change, because basically, it wasn't so great for the people. I'm not exactly sure all that was happening, but when you have to have 2-3 layers of folks telling you how to live your lives – pharisees, kings, and empires – it couldn't be easy.

Now, to understand why the people, us, wanted a KING, we have to go back a bit further in history...(I hope I got this down right...)

In the book of Judges, there are your tribes within each are your tribal leaders – who are basically military leaders. And it was a mess. A corrupt, dumpster fire of leadership. The people started grumbling and said if we had a King – we would be better off. A King would bring order, and rules for all to follow, and a sense of legitimacy, I suppose.

So they asked the prophet Samuel to ask God to give them a king. Well, this was a big snub to God who was their king. And God said, through the prophets, you are not going to like having a human king. They'll take your money, send your sons to wars, give you inane rules, and it will all happen within corruption. And yet – we got King Saul and King David. And oh yeah, all that happened. And some good things happened too from time to time – yet usually through the use of an army and violence. We also got Jesus who comes from the Kingly lineage of David.

So when the people are waving their palms, and protesting, and declaring “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” – you know, Jesus who is a descendant of King David – well, historically that meant violent corrupt dumpster fire Kings that are a threat to the all that is upholding the Pharisees and the Empire.

And think about it. This palm protest, that followed so much work and was followed by so much more work – as any protest needs – it was having its effect. When the pharisees say to Jesus “order your disciples to stop,” they are already talking to him like he is a king – that he can order folks around. Yet Jesus answers

with, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” He was not here to order folks around.

Jesus was not here to slight enemies by violence, force, or power. He was not the King who gave us rules and manifests and orders. Jesus gave us a commandment.

John 13: 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

This commandment is so important – it is recited 4 more times in the New Testament:

- John 15:12 – This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
- 1st Joh 3:23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
- 1st John 4:21: the commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.
- 2nd John 1:5: But now, dear lady, ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another.

Jesus gave us a simple commandment. We are to love – each other – our neighbor – the stranger – we are to love the other.

And he told lots of stories to help us know how to do that – the good Samaritan, caring for those you do not even know – welcoming the stranger – loving your enemies – not throwing stones until you are sinless – healing each other – feeding each other – the list continues.

Yet if you look at history, and if you look at today, it is not an easy one. And we don't often do it well.

Maybe there's a hint of an exasperated Jesus in these words written in 2017 by a young adult author frustrated with the politics of her time. "I don't know how to explain to you why you should care about other people."

Besides reminding us it's Jesus' biggest commandment, I don't either. But thought we'd try this.

Take your palm – your banner of radical protest which really came down to loving each other.

All those names are people you love, right? People who you pray for, ask God to watch over them, who you are willing to do about anything for them.

Break off one of those names.

Put it in the offering plate.

Sit with them being gone from your world for just a second.

Now, take the name of a stranger from the offering plate.

Hold someone else's loved one in your hand for just a second.

Weave that loved one into the names on your palm.

It won't stay well, will it. If we want it to stick, for us to really keep that stranger in our hearts and mind, to really make it stick – we need help.

There's some tape in your pew.

This is why we need the holy spirit – to help us along.

Stick that stranger into your midst of loved one.

Tape it onto your palm.

What does it mean to be a radical and follow Jesus? It means to love the other, as Jesus loves us. As we love the known.

We are entering a week of contemplation.

I have a confession to make – I do not understand the resurrection. It is a complete mystery to me. And that makes it hard, sometimes to be in the church.

So, for my questioning radical soul, it takes faith to be here. Short story. When I was living in DC one of my friends was, still is, Jewish. And we celebrated Passover and I had my first Passover meal with all its traditions. My friend Lisa was going to go to Easter service with me the next day. So as we were cleaning up she asked me to tell her the Easter story – she had never really heard the whole story. So I told her. When I was done, she looked at me and said, “and you believe that?”

Right then, the phone rang – I kid you not. And it was my mom, Mary Mumgaard. I told her the conversation we were having and what Lisa said and mom said, “Annie, that’s why we call it faith.” So again, for my questioning radical soul, it takes faith to be here.

In the movie “Conclave” Cardinal Lawrence says (and a bit of a paraphrase from Pope Francis): “There is one sin which I have come to fear above all others: certainty. Certainty is the great enemy of unity. Certainty is the deadly enemy of tolerance...our faith is a living thing precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty and no doubt, there would be no mystery and therefore, no need for faith.”

Certainty is the enemy of unity and tolerance.

What does it mean to love our neighbors? We are told to pray “lead me not into temptation.” So, when we were talking, Pastor Kris and I discovered we pray just about the same thing every day – so you can join us. Pray and ask what I am to do today? How am I to love today? And may you move into your day with faith in the mystery, and the need, for radical action. That is, to love.

Amen.