

Palm Sunday
Matthew 21: 1-11

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ “Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Trinity Presbyterian Church
April 9, 2017

“The Things That Can’t Be Stopped”

Intro: Isaac Newton once famously claimed that an object in motion will stay in motion. It is a basic theory with a basic principle. Once something is in motion, it is difficult to stop. On Palm Sunday Jesus sets his salvation plan into motion. He tells his disciples to swipec a donkey. He makes an announcement to the assembly that "Your king is coming!" Picture the excitement as wide-eyed children wave palms like dime-store flags— “Hosanna, Save us!” Maybe even hear some of them chanting, "Make Israel great again!" As they march into Jerusalem, all the momentum is with Jesus. And we know, once the plan is in motion, some things can’t be stopped.

1) The Palm Sunday scene is like a page torn straight out of the newspaper. It is a band of protesters marching to make a political and religious statement. Like when protesters marched during Moral Mondays into the guts of Raleigh to snarl at state legislatures. “Forward together, not one step back!” Waving protest signs at powerful politicians who sit on Capitol Hill, threatening to take away healthcare, or remove environment protection policies, or threatening women’s rights, or LGBTQ rights. Or like the Women's March back in January. When half a million-strong clogged the arteries of our nation’s capital to send a message: we will not budge until all of us are treated with equal dignity. It seems we can go almost anywhere these days and

find a rally we can participate in. Stand with Standing Rock. Black Lives Matter. HB2. Environment Protection. Immigration. Travel Bans. The war in Syria. All groups who gather to pound the paths leading straight into the bowels of injustice. It's the Palm Sunday scene. A flesh and bone rally, making a loud political and religious statement.

2) But wait a minute! Look over the horizon toward the other side. Notice: the empire has their agenda too: Keep things under order. Stay in control. The emperor has called in the reinforcements to keep the peace during Passover. Remember Passover is Israel's national holiday of freedom. When God delivered the Jews out of Pharaoh's claws. So, the orders come trickling in from high command: keep the zealots at bay. Squash the insurrectionists. Eliminate any ideological sign about the possibility of an insurgece. The emperor knows the celebration can't be stopped, but it can be kept under surveillance and tight control. Watch as the soldiers with riot gear forge the frontlines. Legions of first responders primed and ready for action. Feel the tension rise as an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. On the one horizon, is the unstoppable force of Rome's regime. On the other is the immovable band of Jesus followers. We brace for impact as the two kingdoms are about to collide.

3) Well we know what happens. They stop Jesus. They put the kibosh on the revolution. The strategy is precise: If you kill the leader, you kill the momentum. They are sending a clear message to the rest of us: if you mess with real power, things are going to get ugly. People are going to die. Some things can't be stopped. So, they snuffed Jesus out like he was a tiny flicker on a candle wick. They showed the world how weak and powerless he really was. Some saw it all happen. Watched as a crown of spikes was pressed onto his scalp. "King of the Jews, huh?" they mocked. Some saw the ribbons of flesh dangling from his back as he stumbled his way up the hill to Golgotha. And of course, who could ever forget that lonely shriek he bellowed from the cross, "My God, my God...why?" The sound still sends trembles down our spines. But then...silence. Jesus' body drooping and spineless. Hanging like heavy laundry on a clothes line. If you kill the leader you kill the momentum. They are sending a message to the rest of us: real power can't be stopped.

4) So, what sense can we make of it all? How are we to understand the meaning beneath the violence? After all, don't we put a cross in every church sanctuary? On top of every steeple? Maybe even wear one on a chain around our necks? For millennia people of faith have surveyed the wondrous cross and have seen it as something more than just an instrument of death. Maybe we find comfort in knowing that God understands our pain—Jesus has been there. Perhaps we see Jesus emptying out his pockets of "godly-ness" to display the love God has for us. Once had a friend who spent a summer at a church camp. She was asked to play Jesus during a Good Friday reenactment. "What do I do?" she inquired. The counselor said, "Just put your arms against the wood and open them as wide as you can as if you are hugging the entire world." It was a moment of revelation for her. When, for the first time, the cross actually made sense. It is where the mystery of God is revealed in broken flesh. It is the mystery of a love that marches into the bowels of hell to somehow rescue us and save us. "Hosanna!" On the cross is the image of a God who is dying to love us. Spreading arms as wide as he can to embrace our broken world.

5) So maybe we take courage. Knowing that love's power dwells in every one of us. Providing us with strength. Encouraging us to keep going. In the book, *All the Light You Cannot See*, it is a story set during World War II. One of the characters is training at a cadet school for the Nazi youth. There the boys go through fierce physical testing to weed out who is the weakest among them. The boy at the bottom is Fredrick: an awkward, near-sighted young man who loves to bird watch. One wintry day, the boys are introduced to a prisoner who is tied up to an outdoor post, stripped naked, shivering in the cold. One-by-one each boy is given a bucket of water and commanded to throw the pail on him. It is a torturous death. Eventually, the pail gets passed to Fredrick. He looks at the prisoner on the pole, looks down into the calm icy water, but then dumps the bucket out onto the ground. The commander gives him another pail of water. Fredrick pours it out again. "I order you!" screams the commander. Fredrick looks at the prisoner with his near-sighted eyes and replies, "I will not." Now what do you think happened to the boy who disobeyed the command? What do we think happened to the one who became a threat simply by not participating in the inhumane? When we are told to ignore the immigrant or the refugee, we respond, "We will not." When we are told to follow the agenda even when it endangers other human lives, we say, "We will not." It is the strength of eternal love dwelling within us. Giving us the courage to keep going.

Conclusion: So we look upon the cross remembering. Remembering the weak one who poured himself out for us. Gazing upon the one who stretches out his arms wide in welcome. All mercy and love is yours and mine, so we might as well receive it. Because no matter how hard our world tries, some things just can't be stopped.