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John 12:12-16

A Journey to Resurrection

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 12:12-16 NRSV

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

I was in the Gospel Choir when I was in college at Trinity University in San Antonio (Go Trinity!) and one of my favorite songs to sing and dance to was Ride on King Jesus, Ride on. And when I would sing then and today, I think of Palm Sunday. “Hosanna!” the crowd shouts. “Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!” and by Friday those cries of joy have shifted. “Crucify! Crucify this one who did not meet our expectations! Crucify this one who we have so misunderstood. We thought he was the one to rescue us.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The people were looking for a warrior-king riding on a white stallion, but they got a carpenter riding a donkey.[[2]](#footnote-2) They wanted hype and they got a healer. They wanted a scepter and a crown and they got a savior. There was a horrible tragedy in Brooklyn last week when seven children in an Orthodox Jewish family were killed in a house fire because a hot plate was left on to keep food warm for the Sabbath. The father spoke at their funeral and described their death as a sacrifice and said that everything was in God’s hands. He said, “We are only reflecting back the light. We do not understand the plan.”[[3]](#footnote-3) I do not believe that it is the will of God that children should die in house fires. I do not believe that it is the will of God that people should hide their depression and tragically pilot a plane with 150 people on it into the French Alps.

We have been on a journey to resurrection these past forty days of Lent. Lent is an intentional time of self-reflection and repentance, a time to look at our lives and see how God can help us find the answers we need. We brought our heavy loads on this journey, ready for resurrection, ready for new life, ready for transformation, ready to be a new creation as we looked forward to Easter with hope.

One of my favorite books that I read when I was growing up was called Joshua by Joseph Girzone. It is a story that imagines what it would be like if Jesus lived in our world today. Joshua moves into a small cabin on the edge of town and everyone is curious about this quiet, simple man who appears to seek nothing for himself. He works as a carpenter, but does not charge much for his services. And people tell stories about him visiting a sick child in a poor part of town who was dreadfully ill but recovered completely after Joshua’s visit. Everyone who comes into contact with him is transformed by his incredible warmth and his acceptance and love.

Jesus comes to our town and he wants to help; but we don’t recognize him for who he is. We think Jesus will be impressed with our houses and our businesses and our stuff, but Jesus wants our hearts. On that Palm Sunday day the crowd shouted, “Hosanna!” which means save us Lord, and Jesus did, but not in the way that they expected. Jesus comes into the crowd, into their houses, into their hearts and into our hearts. Jesus shares our life, our joys and sorrows, our pain and death. God comes in the flesh to be with us, to give us courage and strength, to walk the journey. God comes, not with political power and military might, not with coercion and crushing, not with violence that only brings more violence, but with compassion, with care, with love. “Hosanna! Save us! Come into our world, our community, our lives, our hearts. Walk with us the road of this world’s suffering and this world’s joy. Redeem us, make us whole again; reconcile us to one another.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Jesus comes into this world to save us by sharing our lives.

Today, Dillon, Parker, Rebekah, and Elizabeth were baptized. Their parents, Amanda and Andrew, felt a calling on their life to grow their family and love brought Rebekah and Elizabeth home. This past summer when Amanda was in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and there was roadblock after roadblock and it seemed like all hope was lost, we just kept praying and praying. And Andrew joined Amanda and there was miracle after miracle and I remember being at the airport as Dillon and Parker were going to meet their sisters for the first time and I was so happy and I couldn’t believe that it was really happening. And then, Amanda and Andrew were walking towards our welcome party and there was Rebekah and Elizabeth and Andrew said that they were delayed because the girls had encountered their first water fountain and they were mesmerized. And we were all crying tears of joy and we could not believe that this day that we had prayed for and wanted so much, that day was really here. And as I walked back to my car I thought about how now the hard work begins. Brothers and sisters fighting, tantrums, boundaries, time-outs, rules, and the messiness of living life together as a family.

And there are families who have not had their happy ending. Families who have children that are legally theirs, but their children are stuck in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There are people here right now gripped by depression, filled with hopelessness, trapped in addiction. This week is a reminder to all of us that the tomb to which Jesus goes is a cave with total darkness. It is a place where God realizes the pain of loss because there is nowhere that we can go in life, in death, in life beyond death, where God is not there with us.

May we hear that this story is for us. Jesus suffers, so that when we are suffering we know God understands and cares for us. When Jesus is utterly alone we know God understands us and is with us when we feel alone. Jesus cries out in despair so that when we become convinced the whole world has conspired against us and feel ready to give up, we know that God understands and holds onto us. Jesus dies so that we know God understands death and the fear of death and reminds us that death does not have the last word.[[5]](#footnote-5) In Jesus Christ God experiences everything it means to be human. In Jesus, God knows what it means to doubt and despair, God knows and understands and experiences the worst moments you and I will ever experience.

This is what the journey of resurrection is all about. This week we will remember the final gathering of Jesus with his disciples, Jesus’ arrest and trail, Jesus’ conviction, crucifixion and brutal death on a cross, and his burial in a dark, cold tomb. This week reminds us that there is no part of our life that is so dark that God cannot dwell there with us. We come to this place with all of our flaws, our mistakes, our shortcomings, and we are promised that we need not hide any of that from God because God travels with us through any darkness our life may bring, and God will be there to light our path and support us along the way. Ride On King Jesus. Amen.

1. Abingdon Creative Preaching Annual by Jenee Woodard. Reflection from Teri Peterson on pg. 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11688474/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://christythomas.com/2015/03/27/is-it-gods-will-that-innocent-children-die/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This paragraph is based on Abingdon Creative Preaching Annual by Jenee Woodard. Reflection from Teri Peterson on pg. 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/palmpassion-sunday-b-entering-the-story/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)