

## This is Us: Holy People, Present

1 Peter 2: 9-10; John 12: 1-12

We are gathered at the gates of Jerusalem, ready to greet Jesus, ready to welcome him as our Lord and Savior as he ushers in the Kingdom of God. We are ready for this moment, this present time as we celebrate the King of Kings bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's people. We have waited for this moment and now it is here! We are raising our voices in celebration. We are raising our palms branches in greeting. We are sharing the good news of how the light of Christ came into our lives, how it is changing us, transforming us to be the people God created and called us to be, people of hope and grace for a time such as this, here and now, present day. We stand ready to spread the word about how God's love made and is continuing to make a difference in our lives. We have waited for this moment and now, here it is, present day. We are ready to welcome our King of Kings as he ushers in the Kingdom of God for all of God's people.

Now normally on this day, we tend to read the other Gospel's version of this moment in Jesus ministry. Their descriptions of the crowd's excitement, the crowd's joyous celebration seem to really capture the atmosphere of this particular day. But John's version, well, let's be honest, it is not exactly as exciting as the

other versions of this story. In fact, if John hadn't included that one line about the people breaking off the palm branches, I'm not sure we would even know this text is supposed to be a Palm Sunday text. He skips a lot of the details that the other Gospel writers include. John seems to be more concerned with the fact that the disciples didn't know, that they didn't know what was going on until after the fact. The disciples didn't know what it all meant until after Jesus was glorified. It wasn't until after the fact that everything which had been written about Jesus made sense to the disciples. It was almost like they had to experience the light of Christ in their lives, experience the light of Christ in their world, it was almost like they had to experience the light of Christ in their midst as it actively brought healing and wholeness for all. It was almost like they had to experience the light of Christ in their present day moments for them to really understand who Jesus was and how this understanding would change them as his disciples. For John, as he describes this moment for the disciples, it is almost like John is telling us that it works the same way for us as modern day disciples, almost like we also need the Kingdom of God to come into our very midst, to transform us, for us to understand our core identity as the people of God. It is almost like John is telling us that we need to open our eyes right here, right now, so that we can experience the life giving, the life changing power of the Kingdom of God in our present time.

John gives us a hint to this as he goes to tell his version of the Palm Sunday story. Because he points out that it was not the disciples who welcomed Jesus. It was the crowd. But this was not an ordinary crowd gathered at the gates of Jerusalem. This crowd was made up of the people who saw, who had experienced Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life. This crowd was the very people who had experienced life after death, people who knew that darkness would not have the last word. This was not an ordinary crowd. This crowd was full of people who could not keep quiet about how the Kingdom of God had come into their midst and changed everything. So much so that the powers that be began to get afraid.

Because all of a sudden, this crowd who could not quiet about all that God has done for them, all of sudden this crowd, this crowd was bringing forth a transformation, was bringing forth a wave of positive energy. This crowd was bringing forth a movement for wholeness for all of God's. John describes this moment at the gates of Jerusalem, this present moment when all of sudden the Kingdom of God was made real for all the people in their midst, John describes this present moment as a welcoming parade, a march that tells the powers that be that their days are numbered, a march that is made up of ordinary people who are tired of the way things are now, tired of the way power and might rule while the innocent and the powerless are ignored and mocked. John is telling us that the

Kingdom of God was made real for the crowd that day in the form of a welcoming parade.

That image says it all, doesn't it? We can almost imagine it...the crowd celebrating and moving forward, their energy, their passion, their very presence reaching out and pulling people into their celebration, reaching out to the ones who are on the margins, now embracing them as friends and equals, reaching out to people who have been told time and time again that they don't belong are now being invited into the celebration. All are being welcomed and given a place in the parade. This movement for wholeness is now reaching out to the ones who have been ignored and are now giving them places of honor. This movement for wholeness, this march, this welcoming parade is the Kingdom of God come to life in in our midst here and now, present day for all of God's people, ready to turn the world upside down and usher in a new day!

Or let me say it this way...This past week, I was meeting with a group of clergy colleagues. And our conversation turned to church. I know right, surprise, surprise. What do you expect? So one of my colleagues was talking about things going on in his church and he said, something like he was trying to find a balance between generational groups within the church, and in doing so, seemed to be making no one happy. To which another of my colleagues responded, "Yeah, that seems to be the way of church nowadays. We ask people can you live with this and

one group says, maybe, and another group says, maybe. No one is really excited but we can live with it.” Wait what...we can live with it? That’s what it has all come down to...we can live with it.

I have to tell you this conversation has bothered me all week. I’ve been trying to put my finger on it and it wasn’t until I spent some more time with our two texts today that I realized what bothered me so much about the conversation. I realized that in what John was talking about, in what Peter was talking about...is that we have this joy. This joy comes to us from knowing we are God’s Beloved. This knowledge brings us such joy that it begins to bubble up in of us, and we simply cannot contain it. This joy come to us because we know we are God’s chosen people. We know that once we were lost and now we are found. We know that once we were blind but now we see.

And this lack of joy which seems to be infecting all of our churches is not something we should want to just live with. This joy is the very essence of the Kingdom of God present in our midst. It is a joy, it is a celebration, it is what gives us our identity as Jesus’ disciples. It is what gives us meaning and purpose as God’s people here and now. It is something that grabs hold of us. Because of this joy, we cannot stop spreading the world about how God’s love made a difference, how God’s love continues to make a difference in our lives. And in no place which

holds as its core identity of being God's people, should be okay with accepting such mediocracy.

Sure I'm not asking to be entertained in church but I am asking to be challenged, to see beyond the hurt and the hate, to envision what can be. I want to be told over and over again that the Kingdom of God is our midst, that this, this is something to celebrate, something to share, something to spread the word about until our joy becomes a welcoming parade, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's children as it ripples across our communities, our nation and our world.

And I know I am not the only one who feels this way. The reality is that we have so many choices in our lives, choices of what we could be doing right here and now in this present moment. One of those choices being whether or not to go to church. My guess is that we didn't come here today because we had to. We are here because we want to be here. We know that here and now, present moment, the Kingdom of God is in our midst and we can no longer be silent about the difference God has made in our lives. It is moving us from being mayeah kind of people to now being people who celebrate our God being a work in this world, moving us from being people surrounded by darkness, wondering where God was in all of this, to being people who are standing in the light, to people who are claimed and named as God's very own's Beloved. We have been moved to from people sitting in our pews, staying within our walls to people who are welcoming

others in, people who are sharing the Good News with others in our community.

We are now God's people, instruments of love, instruments of grace, instruments of God's peace, doing the work of the Kingdom of God and spreading the word how God's light made a difference in our lives.

And all we have to do is look at the front cover of our bulletin to know that this is true...the work of the Green Chalice, the gathering of people at our community dinners, the breakfast for the Iron Horse, the assembling of health kits, the filling of our blessing box, our connection with the Cub Scouts and Daisy Scouts, the work with refugees and human trafficking...I could go on and on

But I won't because you see, like the crowd in Jerusalem that day, we know people need to experience the light of Christ in their lives, experience the light of Christ in their world. We know that people need to experience the light of Christ in their present day midst as it brings healing and wholeness to all for them to really understand who Jesus is and how this understanding transform them as his disciples. As God's chosen people, we know that for most, it is almost like they need the Kingdom of God to come into their very midst, to transform them, for them to understand how much God loves them, for them to understand who they are and whose they.

So I guess as God's people, we had better get started....

So Midway Christian Church, This is Us, telling our story as people of hope, as people of love, as people of WELCOME, becoming the people God calls us to be so that the Kingdom of God comes to life more and more here on this Earth. So Midway Christian Church, both past, present and future...in worship, in fellowship, in mission, and in study...This is Us, telling our story as the people of God. Amen.