

“Seek Only the Truth”

Luke 19: 29-40

This Sunday, we conclude our Lenten journey as we come to the gates of Jerusalem. We've been waiting for this moment for weeks now, waiting for that moment when Jesus will enter into the city and usher in his new Kingdom here on Earth. We have finally arrived at the gates of Jerusalem only to discover that things are not what we assumed they would be. Instead what has happened is that when we arrive at the gates, we discover that there are no palm branches to be waved. There are no shouts of Hosanna for us to join in as we welcome our King. There are no great crowds. It is simply Jesus riding in on a donkey, surrounded by his disciples. On this last Sunday of Lent, we arrive at the gates of Jerusalem only to discover that things are not what we assume them to be.

I have to tell you that probably out of all the versions of the Palm Sunday story, Luke may just be my least favorite. Because it's well, kind of plain. It doesn't have the pomp and circumstances which Matthew and Mark offer us. It doesn't connect the pieces for us with prophecies from the Old Testament like the others do. Rather instead, Luke's version, in its plainness, in its starkness, in its simplicity, Luke's version confronts us with our illusions. It takes away everything we assumed was correct and right about this story and leaves us only with the

Truth. Yes, Jesus is ushering in his Kingdom here on Earth but it is not what we expected. Luke's version of this Palm Sunday story confronts us with our illusions and leaves us with a choice...that choice being...Will we follow or will we turn away? Will we follow Jesus through the gates of Jerusalem, embracing the invitation to seek only the Truth or will we stay...stay outside of the walls, denying what's there, taking comfort in our false illusions. To be honest, as a person of faith, this choice which Luke brings me today, makes me very uncomfortable and wary of entering into the gates of the city.

Here's what I mean by this. All along Jesus has been telling us what to expect once we get to Jerusalem. He tells us way back in Chapter 9 that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, that he will be rejected by elders, chief priests and scribes. Jesus tell us way back in Chapter 9, that he will be killed and on the third day would be raised. Jesus tells us way back in Chapter 9 when he sets his face toward Jerusalem, what to expect when he enters the gates of that particular city. All in all, Jesus tells us three times what to expect when we got to this moment on our journey. Only we decided we did not want to listen.

We decided we would rather hold on to our assumptions. We decided we would rather think we knew best about how the Kingdom of God would really work. Even before we reached the gates of Jerusalem, we decided that we would

rather assume God played by our rules than listen to what Jesus actually told us to be TRUTH along the way.

But really who could blame us, right? After all, we have heard the stories about how Jesus gave sight to the blind. We have heard the stories about how Jesus made the lame to walk. We have all heard the stories of how Jesus made the sick well so it shouldn't be too much of a surprise that we all assumed when Jesus finally got to the gates of Jerusalem, he would usher in his Kingdom, taking things over, running the Romans out and putting his disciples into power. That's how it is supposed to work, right?

But now...now that we are at the gates of Jerusalem, we are discovering none of that is happening. Jesus is not taking over. He is not challenging the Romans. He is not even claiming the title of Messiah. It is simply Jesus coming in on a donkey, surrounded by his disciples. And you know what the most uncomfortable thing of all really is...is that he is inviting us to follow, inviting us to seek only the Truth. At the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus is inviting us to put aside our assumptions, to put aside our illusions. Jesus is inviting us to simply follow him as we seek only the Truth.

Now let me stop right there and say...We all know that there is truth and there is TRUTH, all of which makes this conversation and our encounters with

Jesus even more difficult. Because we all hold certain truths, certain understandings which guide our actions, certain beliefs which shape our decisions and yes we even hold certain truths which form our faith. We may have gleaned these truths from our past experiences, from our various backgrounds. We may have learned these truths through hours of study. Over a long period of time, we have developed certain truths and now...now they are a part of who we are. They are part of our identity. They are a part of how we view and interact with the world around us.

However even we know, whether we want to admit it or not, we know that some of the truths we hold are not exactly Truths. They are more like guidelines, guidelines which we have created to make ourselves feel better, guidelines which we have created to keep us from experiencing and naming the brokenness of the world around us. All of us have certain guidelines which we use to create a bubble, if you will, a bubble which separates us and prevents us from seeing things as they truly are. For example...one truth that I hold is calories don't count when I am eating chocolate. This is especially true on my birthday or any day which ends in y. However as much as I want this to be true, because I really do want chocolate to have no calories, it simply isn't true. And there is nothing I can do to make it so.

Or let me say it this way: I was part of a presentation with a few of the other female ministers on Thursday night at the Midway Woman's Club. As part of this

presentation, we were asked what it is like to be a female in such a male dominated field. We all shared a few of our experiences and then one of the ministers shared that it always amazes her that more often than not, it is women, especially older women, who struggle the most with the idea of a women being a minister, that it is just something some women just can't accept.

I think someone in the group asked why that is and again, each of us gave possible various answers. But as I have thought about this and as I shared that night, I believe that this inability to accept women as ministers is grounded in the fact that for many women, especially older women, it goes against one of their truths, a supposed truth which has guided their lives for so long. Experiencing a woman ministers confronts them in ways which makes some women, especially older women, uncomfortable.

I followed this up by saying I do not deny that it says quite clearly in our bibles that women should be silent in church, right there in 1 Corinthians but...but it has been proven and shared by researchers, by biblical scholars that these particular verses were added after the fact, after the original letter. Biblical scholars have manuscripts which are to be some of the earliest records of this text and these manuscripts do not contain these troublesome verses. Yet...these verses are the ones which are always lifted up as Truths for why women should not be ministers.

As I have reflected on this conversation over that last few days and given so much of what is happening in our current culture right now, meaning we live in time when it seems like civil discourse is a thing of the past, when all we can do is argue with one another, given that we live in a time when we can't even disagree with one another without feeling the need to personally attack the other, as I thought about all this, especially in light of Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story, I am realizing that this tension, this lack of civil discourse all boils down to this...our reaction when our supposed truths fall apart. Because when we start wondering if some of our supposed truths may in fact not be true, then what? What other supposed truths, truths which we have been taught, which we have held as values for so long, truths which have shaped our lives for years and years, if these supposed truths actually turn out to be not true, then what else is not true?

Think about it for a moment...because when we start asking ourselves these types of questions, it is scary. It is unnerving. Things can begin to unravel and fall apart quickly. And that leaves us extremely uncomfortable. It leaves us feeling as if we don't have our feet underneath us. It feels like our very foundations are being destroyed. In moments like these when we are confronted with the fact that our supposed truths may indeed not be actually true, what happens is we shut down. Logic and reason go out the window. And we become emotional. We feel attacked and then we go on attack.

Instead of admitting that there might be another way to view something, another way to be, another way to experience things, instead of admitting that there might be another way, instead what we do is we hold on tight to our supposed truths. We say Everyone else is wrong and I am right. We clench our fists. We add to the brokenness of the world by causing ourselves and others more hurt and pain.

Again, I need to stop right here and clarify...When I am talking about supposed truths, I'm not just talking about the issue of women being ministers. I'm talking about just about everything we assume we know or think we know. It can be as simple as what brand of toothpaste we should be using to larger issues concerning same sex marriage, racial injustice, welcoming the immigrant, to just name a few.

This way of holding onto our illusions with force and might rather than seeking out the Truth affects all of us and involves all concerns in our current culture. And again, please hear me say, this holding on to our supposed truths is not limited to any one group. I am not singling anyone out. It happens in every class, in every race, in every background, liberals, conservatives, male, female, young old. It doesn't matter. Holding on to our supposed truths instead of seeking only the Truth is human nature. We all do it.

So please hear me say I am not pointing any fingers because I am including myself in this as well. And maybe if I'm being honest, that's the main reason I don't like Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story.

Because it challenges us more than most of us are comfortable with when it comes to deconstructing our supposed truths. It strips away all the fluff, you know the palm branches, the huge crowds, the shouts of Hosanna, all that stuff we use to hide from reality and leaves us with a choice...we can seek only the Truth by following Jesus, by actually listening to what he says, things like love our enemies, things like do not judge, even things like if we want to follow him, we must pick up our own crosses. With his brutally simplistic version of the Palm Sunday story, Luke leaves us with a choice: We can either decide to follow Jesus, seeking only the Truth as we go or we can stay where we are with our illusions. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot serve two masters because we will love the one and hate the other, or we will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Luke wants us to realize that by holding on to our illusions, our small truths, we often ignore the hard work of transformation. We ignore the hard work of reconciliation. We ignore the hard work healing and wholeness. And in doing so, we are unable to become the people God created and calls us to be....people who know that the Kingdom of God never played by our rules and it is not about to start now. People who know that the very purpose of the Kingdom of God is to

turn things upside down and create possibilities of new life when all there was before was death and despair. People who know that the Grace and Love are the only Truths which will set us free.

Again, I don't have all the answers as we continue to be challenged by the wisdom from the Tree of Life but I will offer you this....As disciples of Christ, we were never promised easy answers nor were we offered an easy journey. What we were promised was this...that no matter what the journey may bring, not matter if it looks like darkness will overcome us, we were promised that love and light will always have the last word.

Knowing this...may we have the courage and strength to enter into the gates of Jerusalem, seeking only the Truth as we go. Amen.