

“We Shall Not Be Moved”

Luke 19: 28-44

This past Thursday afternoon, when I sat down to write this sermon, I wondered why the Spirit of God was quiet. Unlike my usual times of prayer and sermon writing, there was no connection. There was no urgency from the Spirit to bring forth the Word of God. There was only silence and a lot of words crossed out on the pages set before me, but there was no sermon coming forward. So I decided to step away and try again later.

Only to learn on Thursday night that the US released missiles on Syria. This was in response to a chemical attack which Syria had led on its own citizens earlier in the week. On Friday morning, when this news greeted me, and in looking at the images of devastation, in seeing the faces of the men, women and children suffering, dying from the chemical attack, in looking at the video of the missiles being launched from the ship, I wondered just exactly what Word was I supposed to bring on Sunday.

Because, to be honest, as a person of faith, over the last few days, I have been struggling, struggling to find the Light of God in the midst of the darkness, a darkness that is closing in on us more and more every day, a darkness that is threatening to overtake us. As I saw the ever increasing images of brokenness and hurt becoming our present reality, I wondered what Word I was supposed to bring

this morning, especially in the midst of a darkness that goes against the very shouts of joy we raise in our Palm Sunday celebrations. How was I supposed to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God when in reality, I was wondering where God was in the midst of all this.

You see, normally our tradition is to begin Holy Week strictly with a Palm Sunday celebration. Unlike other churches who do Palm to Passion, we are strictly a Palm Sunday kind of church. No starting with shouts of joy only to end the service with shouts of sorrow. No starting the service by waving of the palm branches only to end by waving away Jesus as we deny him as our Savior. No, it is our tradition do strictly Palm Sunday celebration, to wave the palms, to shout Hosanna, to celebrate the coming of the Lord.

Yet this year, to me, it feels like our shouts of joy are empty. Unlike in years past, they are not reminding me that our God is still at work in our world, that our God is answering our pleas. They are not reminding me that our God is working to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's children.

Instead, these shouts of joy are ringing falsely in my ears. They are too bright. They are too noisy. They mask the shouts of lament my heart is making this morning for all of God's people. And as a preacher, as a person of faith, I'm not sure how I, how we proclaim that the Kingdom of God is coming when I'm not,

when we are not even sure where God is in the midst of all this brokenness and hurt that is filling our world right now.

I know I am not the only one asking these questions right now. On Friday, that seemed to be the running theme on all the preaching blogs I follow. All of us preacher types were hoping that people way smarter than us would give us the words to say this morning, words which would make everything better, words which would make everything not so real. Or if they couldn't do that, then at least give us permission to pull out an old sermon and preach it instead, but nothing like that came forward.

So that brings us to now. All I can say is that as a minister charged to bring the Good News to the people of God, I cannot and I will stand before you with any easy answers. I will not stand before you with empty platitudes or quick fixes to any of this. Because that really doesn't help anything. Pretending that bad stuff is not happening in our world right now only allows us to mask our pain, to mask our fear, and continues to allow uncertainty to guide us in all that we say and do.

To be honest, I had thought about changing our text this morning to something more relevant to situation happening in our world right now. Only to be reminded by the Spirit that in the time of King Herod, in a time of uncertainty and fear, a time in which the governing systems were ruled by power and might, Jesus was born. And the Spirit didn't stop there. It also reminded me that in the time

Pontius Pilate, who was an agent of the Roman Empire, in the time of Pontius Pilate, the Prince of Peace came riding into Jerusalem on a colt as an agent of the Kingdom of God.

I realized that was why I needed the shouts of joy this morning. I needed to hear again this week, we needed to hear again this week, that this world does not have the last word. We needed and still need to know that God is still at work in our world. We need to hear that for times such as these, as people of faith, we are called to preach the good news always, using words when necessary. We need to know that just when it seems hopeless, just when it seems like the darkness has won, just when it feels like it is all too much, the Kingdom of God will always find us.

It will break into our world. It will break into the darkness. It will meet us where we are, centering us in the presence of our God. Today, the Kingdom of God finds us in our uncertainty, finds us in our fear, finds us in need of hope, by riding in on a colt, ushering in the light and love of God for all of God's people. Today, the Kingdom of God is inviting us to shout for joy once more. Just like it did all those years ago for the people of God. Just like it does for us today.

That's why Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story is the perfect reading for us today. It tells us that the Kingdom of God will do all that. It will find us in the darkness. It will transform our shouts of lament into shouts of joy. It will find

us in our fear and transform it into acts of hope and love. Because if you take nothing else from today, know this: The whole purpose and point of Palm Sunday is to remember that God has worked in the past to save God's people and God will do so again. God will never ever leave God's people in the darkness. God will bring us always back to life.

Now, yes, Luke's version doesn't include some of the more familiar details to the Palm Sunday story. It does not include the waving of the palm branches. It does not include the shouts of Hosanna by all of Jerusalem. But it does include the most important part...Jesus. In Luke's version, there is only Jesus, surrounded by his disciples, ushering in the Kingdom of God, just like he had been doing since the very beginning of Luke's Gospel. In a time of King Herold, Jesus came. In the time of Pontius Pilate, Jesus came. In the time of missiles, fear and uncertainty, Jesus comes to us, riding in on a colt, surrounded by the people who left everything behind just to follow him, surrounded by the very people who had seen him do amazing miracles, who had heard his life changing word. On this day, what is important, what we hold onto is that Jesus comes to save us through his grace and mercy. Here he is surrounded by a rag tag bunch of people, throwing their dirty, dusty cloaks on the ground as they welcome him as their King. He does not come in power and might. No, he comes in peace. He comes in hope. Jesus comes to save us from the hurt and brokenness of our world.

Nothing is going to stop Jesus from completing the mission at hand. He will not be moved. On this day, he still has his face set towards Jerusalem and he is determined, determined to announce the good news to the poor, determined to release the captives and free the oppressed, determined that this world will not have the last word. And as his disciples, we give thanks for that. Jesus is able to do what we are not, what we cannot. He is able to save us from ourselves. Jesus saves us from our actions that divide and separate. Jesus saves us from our words that hurt and harm. Jesus comes to save all us from the darkness at hand.

The beautiful thing is that as Jesus' disciples, as the ones who have made this journey to Jerusalem with him, we know that Jesus has come, that Jesus is here to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's children, with us or without us. So either we can join in and follow behind him or we can sit on the sidelines, it really doesn't matter. Because either way, on this day, the things that make for peace are in our midst. Today, we have been visited by God's love and mercy. Either way, whether we decide to follow Jesus, joining his disciples as they welcome their king, or we decide to sit on the sidelines, waiting and watching, either way, the things that make for peace are in our midst. God's love and grace are surrounding us and right now, they are making their way into Jerusalem, ushering in the Kingdom of God.

Sure, the powers that be will try to stop Jesus from doing just that. They will tell him to quiet down his disciples. They will tell Jesus to make his disciples behave. The powers that be will want Jesus to make his disciples stop causing problems. To which Jesus will respond... “Even if they are quiet, the very stones will cry out. The stones will cry out in joy. They will cry out, asking God to save us from ourselves. Even if the disciples are quiet, the very stones will cry out, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near.”

And as people of faith, that is why we are here. We are not called to play by Rome’s rules. We are called to live our lives by the guiding values of hope, justice and mercy, the very values that make up the core and heart of the God’s Kingdom. It is God’s love that lifts us up from the darkness and ugliness of this world and makes us new. Even in our lament, we can find the strength and the courage to say that The Kingdom of God is near and we will not be quiet. Today, in spite of the world trying to rob us of our joy, we will celebrate the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We find this strength, we find this courage, not because of who we are but because of whose we are. We are children of the most powerful and loving God who came down to earth, who became one of us, and who comes to us again today, riding into Jerusalem to save us from ourselves.

We will celebrate because for times such as these, we were called. For times such as these, we followed our Savior. For times such as these, we are to proclaim

that the Kingdom of God came near. Today, Jesus comes, riding in on a colt, coming as agent of the Kingdom of God, centering us in the presence of God once more in our times of fear and uncertainty. Today, Jesus comes to us, reminding us that God does not and will not leave us alone as we make this journey as prophets of God's peace.

For times such as these, as people of faith, in spite of the darkness, we will celebrate. We know that now and forever more this world will not and does not have the last word. Only God does and right now, our God is riding into Jerusalem on a colt, saving us from the ugliness of this world, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's children. In the time Pontius Pilate, in the time of missiles and fear, Jesus comes.

People of God: Hear the Good News! The Kingdom of God is near! Shout Hosanna! Let us celebrate the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Let us give thanks to the one who comes to save us from the darkness, to save us from the hurt and hate and more importantly let us give thanks to the one who comes to save us from ourselves. Amen.