April 13, 2014

Matthew 21:1-11

*That Day*

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NRSV   
When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, “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.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

I am so thankful for the gifts of the Greenland Hills family, thank you Rev. Tim McLemore. You have truly made the scripture come alive for us this morning. I felt like I was there. Did you feel like you were there? Jesus and his disciples had been resting in a village outside Jerusalem, Bethpage. Jesus then sends two disciples into town to fetch a donkey and a colt that the Lord will provide. I love how in Matthew’s Gospel the writer takes the words of Zechariah 9:9 literally. Zechariah says, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” There is this image in Matthew’s Gospel of Jesus somehow sitting astride both animals at the same time. I do not know how that works.

But let me share with you the next verse, Zechariah 9:10, “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” It is Jesus who shall command peace to the nations.

A very large crowd greets Jesus. People spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches from the trees to make a path for Jesus. They shout “Hosanna to the Son of David!" “Hosanna" literally means, "O, save" or "save, I pray." And then they begin shouting from the words of Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Something big is happening.

Those in the city asks, “Who is this?” And the crowd who has seen his miracles and learned from his teachings say, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

I wonder what it would have felt like to have been one of the parade goers that day. Hearing the noise of the crowd and then coming to explore for yourself what was going on. Or one of the disciples who watched this parade develop and grow into something they could not have even imagined. It was the third Sunday in September in 2008 and we had been waiting for a couple of hours. It was hot and I was thirsty. But then the floats in front of us began to move, pick-ups trucks were getting turned on, people were moving! It was going to be our turn in the parade! As we turned the corner onto Cedar Springs Road, it felt like I was being blown away by the noise from the thousands of people in attendance. I felt like a rockstar as everyone began screaming for us as we walked by. Surrounded by so many people it did not seem strange to scream at the top of your lungs as some folks from the United Methodist Church walked by at the Pride Parade in Oak Lawn. And every year since I have walked in the Pride Parade, it is just so much fun.

Some of you may have participated in a parade. Last month my husband Lee and I took our 9 year old daughter, Madeleine, to Washington D.C. and we stood on the very spot that Martin Luther King Jr. stood by the Lincoln Memorial as he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington. There is nothing quite like gathering with others to protest unjust laws or call for social action. At the end of our Washington DC trip we flew out of Baltimore so we stayed with my mom’s college roommate, Beckie, who lives in Baltimore. She shared with us about when she marched on the Mall in Washington to protest the Iraq War. Her words stuck with me, she said, “I guess it didn’t make a difference.” But she said that it made her feel like she was a part of something bigger to walk with others in protest.

At a parade or a protest there is the opportunity for the community to come together and to stand up for what they believe. As the crowds gathered around Jesus that day that we remember as Palm Sunday, the community came together to celebrate Jesus as the King. Hosanna in the Highest. The people in the city wondered, “Who is this?” Those who had followed Jesus felt like it was clear who Jesus was, they quoted from the Psalms and shouted scripture.

Who is this one hailed by peasants, lepers, widows, the blind, prostitutes and day laborers as the Messiah? Who is this one from the country riding into the city of Jerusalem like a king? Who is this whose devoted followers soon leave him, his friend Peter denies him, and the crowds accuse him? Who is this who is tried by both religious and political elite and found an enemy to the establishment? Who is this who is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and taken to the execution grounds? Who is this who is hung on a cross, abandoned and forsaken? Who is this?

Jesus comes not in power but in weakness, not in might but in vulnerability, not in judgment but in mercy, not in vengeance but in love. Nothing about him conforms to the expectations of a world that has come to believe above all things that power wins. This is Jesus, the One we confess died not in order to make it possible for God to love us but rather to demonstrate that God already does love us and that God’s love is our only hope. This is Jesus, the one we proclaim each week as Messiah and Lord, source of hope and healing. This is Jesus whose story comes to a climax this week in order that our story might begin anew and afresh with hope and promise. Amen.