

04/05/2020 Palm Sunday Communion

Sermon: Arriving in Humility and Peace.

Theme: We seek to live and practice the same humility that Christ showed, Allowing God to shape our relationships and our service to the world.

Purpose: We will reaffirm our call to humility in our relationships with one another.

Scriptures: Philippians 2:5-11 Have the same mind as was in Christ who did not count equality with God as something to be exploited.

Matthew 21:1-11 Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

Questions:

What difference would it make in our lives if we were to truly develop the traits of self-restraint and humility? How would our lives be different if we were able to approach our challenges and difficulties with confidence and inner peace? How does our reactivity and turmoil enlarge the problems in our lives? How do we develop the same mind that was shown by Christ Jesus when he set aside his power and took upon himself the form of a humble servant? What is the real benefit of living as joyful, humble servants rather than fighting for our own way? How does the gospel set us free from a life of conflict and meaningless battles?

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

21:1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying 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. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' ⁴This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵ '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.'

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The 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!'

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' ¹¹The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Conversation Starters:

What does it mean to be humble? How does true humility show itself in a person's life and actions? Are there any people who stand out to you as having the strength of humility?

Where do you picture yourself in the Palm Sunday Story? Would you be one of the disciples going to get the donkey and leading the parade? Would you be one of the crowd joining in? Or would you be among those afraid that the noise and turmoil would stir retaliation?

The Processional into Jerusalem differed from the many times when Jesus instructed people not to speak of the miracles or work that he was doing. How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus finally being public about his Messianic identity? Do you think they were excited, apprehensive, or nervous?

Why do you think the whole city of Jerusalem was in turmoil over Jesus' arrival? Do you think there were more who were upset about what Jesus did? Or do you think the reaction of the people was what caused all of the discomfort? Or was it both?

The symbol of the donkey was a symbol of humility and the humility of a teacher as opposed to a warrior. But Jesus' entry was a very powerful symbol and a statement of his role as the messiah. Was this a humble act as we often assert or an arrogant gesture as the Pharisees were saying? Can the same act be both humble and powerful?

What do you think it means to have the same mind as in Christ Jesus that "he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited?" In what ways do we strive for "equality with

God” rather than submit ourselves and take on the form of a slave? What does it mean to take the “form” of a slave?

How does the act of humbling oneself result in one being lifted up? Is this guaranteed or is it something that may happen? Do we humble ourselves as a self-serving act?

How does a person develop humility? In what ways does a person need strength and capability in order to be humble? What is the difference between humility and being weak?

What practices or disciplines help you to practice humility? In what ways do you put humility into every day practice?

1. The beginning of Holy Week.
2. What humility really means.
3. Choosing to grow in humility during the coronavirus rather than growing in resentment.
4. Having the mind that was in Christ Jesus means being aware of what we cannot distract ourselves away from.
5. Being people of peace, love, and justice.

Please pray with me: Jesus, Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We need to open our hearts to your word and instruction, to your presence and your peace. Show us how to live as your beloved disciples and to follow you into faithfulness. Teach us to have the mind of humility that is so desperately needed in this world. Open your word to us we pray. Amen.

Sermon:

Holy Week is beginning in the age of the Coronavirus, an odd way of coming together. On the other hand, someone recently pointed out that the actual events of Holy Week did not take place at church, or even in the Synagogue. They took place on the road to Jerusalem; they took place in an upper room, and on a hill outside of town. And then they ultimately took place at an empty tomb. Somehow being away from our usual place of gathering gives us an opportunity to see this week with new eyes. We need to use our imagination more and find Palm Sunday in our hearts, rather than in our familiar places. For all who sent in photos for our processional, thank you. But let’s turn our hearts towards Jerusalem, to the place where God’s grace is going to be experienced in the sacrifice that Jesus will make, and in the resurrection.

The point about Palm Sunday is it is about Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but what makes that triumph very different is that it is made in humility. This is a time for humility. Humility doesn’t mean weakness, actually quite the opposite, humility is strength that is under control. Humility is control and self-discipline. In humility power and capability is placed in the service of wisdom and a higher calling. Humility requires the ability to see beyond one’s own limited perspective, to understand what role we are playing.

In Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on that powerful day he was playing a role that went back over four hundred years, a role of hope and calling people to a renewed relationship with God. There is a weird paradox to Jesus arriving on a donkey, a symbol from Isaiah. The image of a donkey meant that the ruler would not be defined by power and might, but by being a teacher, and by being humble. It is a reflection back to the call that people in power serve as shepherds, rather than as generals. So Jesus' entry in Jerusalem was simultaneous an act of humility, and a powerful statement against the authority of those who ruled by might. It was a way of sharing a peaceful image, but it was also a forceful and bold statement of a call for an end of oppression. We don't think of humility being forceful, bold, and demanding but strangely enough there is far greater power in humility and in self-promotion. Humility speaks with credibility that goes to the heart; self-centeredness never goes deeper than the surface.

We are in a time when arrogance and selfishness get a lot more air time on the media, but humility is what people respect. The noise of self-promotion is in ample supply and there is a ton of it everywhere you turn, but a teaspoon of humility sticks with you and you tend to look for the source where it came from carefully. And this has always been the case.

When Jesus was riding into town from the south west side of the city of Jerusalem, by the slums and the refuse dump where the poor and underclass lived, on the north east side of the city, near the temple and the palace, Pilate was leading a parade of Roman centurions in a show of force. The people had the choice between noise, arrogance, and self-promotion on the north side, or humility and a call to wisdom combined with self-restraint on the south side. The people were so very hungry for wisdom and self-restraint. I think the same hunger is dawning on us today. Things suddenly became serious and we want people who are wise and trustworthy. On the one hand they are in short supply, on the other, you don't really need too many of them. Because like I said, a teaspoon of humility is worth more than tons of arrogance.

There is a principle that Jesus taught – what you sow you will reap, or another way to say it is that want you want, you should be. If you want to see and find humility, the single best way to come across it is to practice it. We always attract to us what we project to others. If we project an attempt to practice humility, we will come to experience more people who also are seeking to practice humility.

I honestly don't know exactly why that happens, but it does hold true. I don't know if by practicing humility we make ourselves more aware of the people who are true in spirit and wise; or if somehow we attract those people to come more into our lives. It's just that it holds true and I have to encourage it. If you want peace, practice humility. Work to be someone who hears the voice of God and the voice of the people who are around you louder than the voice of your own want and emotional enmeshments.

To illustrate this, I saw posts from two friends on Facebook this week. Both are people I've known for years. The one was complaining because she and her husband had plans to go on a cruise of the Caribbean, that has been canceled, and they bought Season tickets for their

baseball team. They had plans to do a tour of the southwest and a cooking class. But instead they are stuck in their homes, and there are people who need to be blamed for this trouble.

The other post was a friend I've also known for awhile and it began with a request for prayer for family members who are in the healthcare field, and a statement of gratitude because her family has been very fortunate through this time, but prayers for all of those who are dealing with illness and fear. Then it went on to say how she has been trying to organize grocery shopping for her neighbors who have compromised immune systems and putting together a community activity of "window bingo" for families with small children. The two posts were so powerfully contrasting, the one focused on her own losses and sacrifices, the other scanning the surrounding world for ways to reach out in love. One was based in self-interest, the other based in humility and love. One is dwelling in the small world of petty loss while the other is actually joyful in the midst of difficulty. The weird truth here is that humility is a lot more entertaining and joyful.

So how do we get to this humility thing? If it's so good, how do we get a piece of it in our lives? It has to do with our minds, or what mind we are living in. We don't realize that we have a choice of our mind. We can have the mind which is dwelling in the noise and confusion of the situation in which we are living, which I will freely admit I am finding myself a couple days out of the last week. Or we can find the mind that was in Christ Jesus that did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, which I suppose I've hit upon a few moments over the past week. There is a huge difference. The mind that was in Christ has a much bigger perspective of what is taking place. When we find ourselves in that mind, we see ourselves in a perspective in that what we choose to do or don't do, and the attitude in which we adopt actually matters. It makes a difference not only to the world on this planet but if we really hit the sweet spot of that mind, it's the whole universe. We find ourselves in a powerful place of peace where what we do and say can be a source of God's love and healing. Don't get me wrong, I've not lost my mind – well not entirely, but the mind that was in Christ is the mind of one who is aligned with God's love and that's a really healing place to dwell.

When we find that mind, we are willing to make the sacrifice of our own comfort and ease because not only does it make sense, but it is a joy to know that we will be a source of God's love for others. Having the mind that was in Christ Jesus is a real practice. The letter to the Christians in Ephesus was a message from the Apostle Paul to deal with the conflicts and challenges which were taking place. There was a great deal of stress on the city of Ephesus as a result of changes in society and illness which had taken place in the community. The city had suffered a plague of flu, strangely making our ability to understand their context a bit clearer. The community was heading into new structures and relationships and the people didn't really know how to deal with that. There were differences of opinion and some of the conflicts were threatening to break down the fellowship of the Christians.

So, Paul gave them his song, this hymn that they should have the mind that was in Christ Jesus. This was more than just to "think like Jesus," but to absorb the manner of Jesus' humility in the

way we feel, the way we speak, and the way in which we respond to the issues we are facing. It isn't just "what would Jesus do," but "What would Jesus say and how with what tone of voice?" How would Jesus relate to the person, particularly when he made himself a servant to the ones who were in need.

This of course is not easy. It takes work and practice to think and speak with humility. We need the self-confidence of people who know that they are loved by God. The ones who have the Mind of Christ have the wisdom to know that often keeping silent is better than speaking, and that if we remain at peace and still internally when we do have an opportunity to speak we will choose words that need to be said. Having the same mind as was in Jesus calls us to sacrifice, but any that we give in sacrifice is more than offset in God's raising and supporting us. We bow to the Lordship of Jesus and know that our surrender raises us much higher than our own efforts at self-promotion.

We are in a time when there is more than enough noise and arrogance, and that isn't filling the need in the world for integrity and honesty. There is plenty of self-interest and very little authentic sacrifice. There is a lot of bluster and reaction, but what we are craving is wisdom and what is thoughtful.

The crowds called out "Hosanna" which is to say, "Lord save us." It is a cry of hope and affirmation while at the same time offering submission and acknowledging need. Hosanna means that we see the leadership that is needed in order to bring us to healing and security. Hosanna to the Son of God! We are affirming that Jesus is our source of wisdom and our model for how we need to respond to one another. Hosanna, we will seek to be people with the mind of humility which brings healing and hope to the people who are near us.