

PALM SUNDAY  
APRIL 5 2020  
YEAR A

At this moment in the life of Jesus, it was – well -  
it seems to me it was one of those times when things were moving quickly, coming together in strange  
and disturbing ways. A time when time itself seemed inconsequential, warped, or....out of sync, elastic.

When whole days could pass in what seemed to be minutes  
and then on the other hand  
a single hour could seem to last forever.

That vertigo feeling of - “wait – what day is it again?”

One of the things contributing to that was the fact that it was Passover time in Jerusalem. Passover. In  
Jerusalem. That in itself is a Very. Big. Thing. Everyone who was anyone – everyone who possible  
could, would go to Jerusalem for Passover. They still do. And at the end of Seder meals, I believe they  
say “Next year in Jerusalem.”

They are there to remember and celebrate the Exodus, when God rescued an enslaved people and set  
them free. Something very big is in the air. Every year Jews remember the miraculous, gracious gift of  
freedom. The freedom of what God had done, and is doing. They remember it. And anticipate the  
freedom to come. And they set an empty place at the table for the prophet Elijah....just in case this is  
the year that he will return and clear the way for God to do it again. If ever the Jews were going to be  
riled up and ready for something to happen...it was at Passover.

So the city is full of people. That causes stress as well as excitement. The need was so great.  
There is an undercurrent of impending danger, or....something else....  
Something big is about to happen.

The Jews were under the oppressive rule of Rome. Sentiments ran high, and this is the time they’d long  
for freedom, some of them plotting to demand it and to overthrow the Romans to make it real, Elijah  
notwithstanding. The need was great. The feelings were high, Come on God – do it again! Part a sea!

**SOMETHING BIG WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.**

And for Jesus himself....it was like that too. In his own life, something big was about to happen. What  
had been gently simmering, then heating up, was now about to boil over.  
His followers, the way the gospels tell it, even those closest to him, had no idea. They didn’t know  
what was going to happen to him there, how close they were to ....everything. Well, perhaps Mary did.  
It seems last week at Bethany as she poured that perfume...maybe she knew. The others? No.

Everything was about to change. You could smell it in the air. Feel it. The need for God’s mercy was  
thick.

Now – right now in our own lives 0  
has the feel of a time like that in some ways. When the need for God’s mercy is thick.  
A time of surreal surroundings and circumstances. A time when we are learning how small have been  
our understandings of time, and space, and what’s most important....

a time where some days drag on

I've never been to Vegas but those who have, tell me that there, there is no sense of time, no night or day, just the sound of the slot machines and artificial lights and an endless, unbroken now.

Like a Salvador Dali painting, you know that one with the melting clock?

And I have a sense that THIS time

could be for us one of the biggest gifts we've ever received. I can hear Mordecai saying to Esther "perhaps you've come to this time in your life for just such a time as this"

It COULD call out the best in us

or

it could tax us beyond bearing, or consolation

Gordon Light's lyric for today says "timid adults strained to see him, staying close, a little shy...not too sure where he would lead them, on to live, or on to die".

Something is changing. And the need for God's mercy is thick among us.

So: Jesus is about to ride into Jerusalem. Something big is happening. Something is about to die. And who knows what Resurrection life will look like and when we will get to see it and live it? Who knows?

And as surely as that donkey plods the path into the city

as surely as that

we're going somewhere

and we don't know the outcome.

And the possibilities are terrifying. And SO exciting.

Just two things now about this particular gift/jewel/pearl of great price of a story.

As Jesus teaches us how to live.

And how to die.

First:

It's almost breathtaking, how he knows. He knows what's going to happen. And he walks right into it. This is no time for backpedaling. Now time for looking for the reverse gear on that donkey. Donkey's don't come with a reverse. That time has past. Freely, deliberately, he moves toward those gates, and what awaits him there.

For me – this is a bold call to stop avoiding the pain of life; stop avoiding it. Stop saying, too easily, "we'll be back to normal before we know it" .

Stop pretending that what has been passing for normal – even a month ago – stop pretending that that was even working, or that it is worth preserving.

it's an invitation to face the fact that now is not a time for answers. Because the system that we've built for ourselves had a built in answering service and that service is not out of order. The current system has no answers for this.

All we can do is move – together – deliberately toward the pain and dare to anticipate what lies beyond it. It's a time for honesty. For being together. Because we can't do this as individuals – the gift of faith is one another – it's a time for honesty, and tears, and deep, deep, communal faith.

The second thing:

Jesus is doing this in the name of the only thing that CAN move us to face this. To transformation, to resurrection.

He is doing this in the name of love. For the sake of love.

He is embodying – in his very being - the way of God in the world.

And what is that?

A way of peace. Justice. Right relationships. Acceptance. Welcome. Table fellowship.

Without limit. To the farthest ends of the earth. “all people that on earth do dwell”.

It's for that that they will nail him to a cross  
and it's that that will call him from the tomb.

When monarchs and rulers in those days

wanted to show off their power, wanted to make a point to the population that they'd better tow the line,

they had a parade. You've seen them. Not so long ago.

They have a parade. They shine up all their weapons, put them all on display. Soldiers, lots of them, in big stompy boots, doing the first century version of a goose step

and then here comes the king, on a gleaming white stallion. The message is unmistakable. Don't mess with us. We're strong and we'll use our strength to get our own way.

In deliberate contrast to that

Jesus rides in his own parade. On the lowliest of beasts. The animal the poorest would ride. AND, Matthew adds, even more vulnerable yet, its colt.

At that time in history, if a king went to visit another king, a state visit, and if that king was going for the purpose of playing the “My army is bigger than your army” game, he would go mounted on the white stallion.

BUT if that king were going seeking peace, willing to talk and to make decisions together for the good of both of their countries,  
if he were going in peace  
he rode a donkey.

The whole palm parade is a huge offering of an alternative vision – holding out another way – refusing to bow to what sometimes seems the only way. Saying that there IS another path. There IS a possibility of hope and we do not have to live the way we are living now. The parade is acting that out without a word. Well one word. Hosanna.

It's an exquisite dance – to the beat of the Creator's heart. The choreography beginning with the slow clop clop of the donkeys' hooves....maybe the little colt slowing them down even more, maybe stopping to nurse (wouldn't that be beautiful?) - that would be just fine because this dance is MADE for such as these.

And then the children join, and as children of all times do, they change the steps, and the energy... waving their branches, the swish of coats as they lay them on the road, the poor, the lame, those on the margins – who never in their wildest dreams thought they'd be in a parade, never mind be right up there with the one leading it all...

It's beautiful. Glorious.

And the sounds are all mixed together, and the sun is warming them even after they've laid their cloaks  
on the road..  
and you can hear the cheering and the longing behind it all

HOSANNA! SAVE US.

Hosanna does not mean hurray so much as it means save us....and sounds less like "wooo hooo" than it  
sounds like a moan from a place so deep. Save us.

The air is thick with it.  
And still is.

And on he goes....through those gates  
and behind him – a group of unlikely new friends, brought together by need and desire  
and together  
together  
they will continue the cry.  
They will.  
Together they will love the unlovely and one another (often the same thing!)  
and they will continue to cry  
Hosanna – Save us -  
as he shows us the only thing that will.