



Sermons from First Presbyterian Church

“Who Do You See?”

The Rev. Evans L McGowan

April 1, 2012

Palm Sunday (5:05)

Isaiah 53

Luke 19:35-44

My grandmother always said, Be careful what you say. Today, I'd like to rephrase these words: Be careful what you see. Last month a man spotted a hooded African-American male walking in his neighborhood. Trayvon Martin was returning to his father's girlfriend's house, having bought candy and a drink. Before the night was out, Trayvon was dead, shot by an overly concerned neighbor, George Zimmerman. As the investigation continues, the cries for justice are hard to discern from the cries of "Crucify him!" Martin saw a person following him. Zimmerman saw an unknown hooded person walking in his neighborhood. Both felt threatened. The result is a tragedy. Be careful what – or who – you see.

Today on Palm Sunday, what or *who* do we see? If we stand among the crowd, we see a prophet, a powerful healer, a king, riding into the holy city on a colt. Yet we also stand here, 2,000 years later, knowing that by the end of the week, we will see a man betrayed and beaten – an image of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. Meanwhile, the crowd chants, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" These words are from Psalm 118, a pilgrim's song of loyal, steadfast love – and yet we know all of the praise will fade away into the dark night of the soul – even his disciples will abandon him. Jesus will be all alone to face his death.

When you peer closely at Jesus, who do you see – a conquering king or a prophet of peace?

In the passage from Luke, we read of people shouting praises to Jesus because of all the powerful deeds **they had seen**. They believed him to be the one foretold in the prophets. He is the Blessed One, the one anointed to reestablish the kingdom of David. They expected to see the return of the king, the overthrow of their oppressors, the kingdom of God here on earth. Yet if they looked closely, they would notice this king rides not on a horse – a symbol of war – but on a donkey – a symbol of peace. Were they mistaken? Did they have the wrong guy?

Luke continues in this passage to give us an inside look at the man behind the curtain, the human being behind the celebrity. We find Jesus alone, and for the first time we see what he sees: Jerusalem, the city whose name means "City of Peace." And Jesus weeps, lamenting, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.'

Jesus desires for Jerusalem to live up to its name, to be the city of peace in a world of war. Will his people hear his call for peace? Will they see the time of their visitation from God?

This isn't the first time Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. In Luke chapter 13, he cries: ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." '

Now is the time Jesus reveals himself to Jerusalem. They rightfully give him praise, but are they willing to see Jesus for who he is, the embodiment of God's love in the community? They certainly see him as the messiah, the anointed one to redeem them from their past and herald the coming of God's kingdom. Yet will they recognize the kingdom of God when it comes?

Jesus has already declared that the Kingdom of God is here, now, in and among the people (Luke 17:21). But his people do not see it. They do not understand they themselves must follow their leader. They must learn the things that make for peace, to follow Jesus in his nonviolent revolution, to repent from their ways and join together in loving one another . . . loving even their enemies. They have radical expectations for their king to save them, and he has radical hopes they would answer his beckoning call.

And here lies the tragedy: if they do not hear his call, if they do not recognize the kingdom of God is at hand, then once again they will destroy their only hope. And Jesus weeps, weeps because he knows the end of the road is here, in Jerusalem, for him and his people. Jesus foresees not only his own crucifix, his own death, but also the crucifixion and death of his people. Before the week is up, he will be crucified, and a generation later they will be crushed by the Roman legions. Oh, would they, would WE, know the things that make for peace!

So what are the things that make for peace, for peace within our hearts and also in our world? What are the things needed not just to grow but to flourish? We need faith. We need to trust in one another and our community, truly seeing each other as brothers and sisters of one Mother-Father God. We need hope. When we forgive one another, we give each other hope that past mistakes will not have the final word on future endeavors. We need love. When we love one another, our love covers a multitude of sins, binding us on a common journey to the City of Peace. And we need God's grace, God's very breath, believing that the same loving breath which drew us into this life would sustain us through the last gasp of this life, and into the next.

Somewhere in the mystery of the things that make for peace lies the willingness to risk one's life for the sake of others. And here our leader makes the ultimate sacrifice – laying down his life in the hopes that his people will rise up – not by the sword but by the Word made incarnate in them. Jesus did not want his people to die in vain anymore than he wanted to die in vain. Yet he knows the end of the road is here, in Jerusalem, the heart of the world, the city of Peace.

Jesus wanted his people to join the nonviolent, peaceful movement of God's loving kingdom breaking into the world here, now. He risked his life for a more just, loving and peaceful world. How might we

be able to do the same? How might we overcome our own fear of death? How might we move beyond our sense of security to risk loving another, risk seeing enemies as children of God?

Richard Buckminster Fuller was a mess. At 32, he was bankrupt, jobless and drinking heavily. He had wasted a promising life – born in a prestigious family, he dropped out of Harvard; twice. One night he stood on the shores of Lake Michigan - his dreams shattered; his finances in shambles. He stared into the cold, dark, beckoning waters, contemplating whether or not to drown himself. . . That night he chose not to take his life. Instead, he decided to live the rest of his life as if he had died that night. No longer would he live in fear of failure but rather cherish each day as a gift. He became a creative inventor and prolific speaker and writer, most notably popularizing the Geodesic Dome – hailed as the lightest, strongest and most cost-effective structure at the time and used all over the world, from housing the homeless in Africa to sheltering scientists in Antarctica facing 180 mph winds. When scientists discovered carbon molecules occurring naturally in this same structure, much like soccer balls, they called them “Buckyballs” after him. After that fateful night, he and his wife went on to live together for over half a century, finally dying within two days of each other.

We may not be destined for great fame, but each of our lives is cherished. We who have been baptized in Christ have already died. We now live a new, beloved life, a life free to love and be loved, a life meant for faith, hope, and grace: the things that make for peace.

May our lives, our homes and our communities, all be New Jerusalems, New cities of Peace.

We walk this road together. We are not alone. Let us not be afraid. Christ is with us still, showing the way of peace in a world in desperate need of it. Let us now go forth from this place as companions on this journey with Jesus, declaring and embodying the things that make for peace. Amen.

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