

**Palm Sunday/March 25, 2018**

**Psalm 118; Mark 11:1-11;**

**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

*"Entering Over New Thresholds"*

It is Palm Sunday, the day we view as the "happy" day before the difficulty, the pain, the struggles, the passion, of Holy Week begin. This is the day when the children come and sing the "Hosannas!" and wave palm branches and we celebrate, yes celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on the symbol of peace and humility and purity, the colt of a donkey, the servant animal.

It is a wonderful children's story, this day of Jesus coming as a king. But it is not a children's story and we are not children any longer and we need to hear this for what it is.

The context: Jesus has completed his ministry which he began some 3-1/2 years before - that time period is debatable, but generally accepted by most scholars. He had gathered a close-knit group called the Apostles, 12 men, who had been with him basically from the beginning. He also had a larger number of women and men who followed him, disciples, students, those who liked him, believed in what he was teaching, supported him and his ministry both in spirit as well as financially. He traveled the length of the Galilee, Samaria and Judea, crossed over the Jordan and ventured into the Gentile territories of Ituria, Trachonitis and the Decapolis. He became so popular because of his parabolic teaching, healings and exorcisms, that he eventually stayed clear of major cities, so as not to become completely overwhelmed. He reached out primarily to the peasant class, which were the vast majority of his people. He spoke to their needs, their frustrations, their downtrodden spirits and gave them hope.

He grew up and lived in an occupied country. Rome kept the peace, but at great cost. We may think of crucifixion as something that happened to Jesus. And of course, it did. But his was not the first or the last. Before he was born, Rome was crucifying people, including the Jews. And it is likely, that when Jesus was a child, rebellions were put down by Rome, where hundreds, and possibly thousands were crucified, lining the roads, so to be an example that Rome did not tolerate rebellion and upheaval. In fact, Josephus, the Jewish historian, records that during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Romans were crucifying 500 people a day outside the city walls. These were cruel and terrible times.

But cruelty was not a monopoly of the Romans. The Jewish governing officials were themselves a scary bunch. Herod the Great was known as a ruthless and vicious man, paranoid and power hungry. He killed his father-in-law, many of his 10 wives, and 2 of his own sons. He laid heavy taxes on the Judean people to pay for his lavish building projects, including the rebuilding of the Temple Mount. And his sons were not much better. Vassals of the Roman Empire, their concern for the Jewish populace was more than lacking.

This was the world that Jesus lived in. This was the environment in which he did his ministry and from which he sought to turn a people back to God. We can imagine his frustration as he says just before he enters Jerusalem, *"O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"* (Mk. 9:14-29) And from Matthew's gospel we have his words, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not."* (Matt.23:37) Certainly, he understood the feelings of the prophets like Isaiah who spoke of being *"a man of unclean lips in the midst of a people of unclean lips."* (Is. 6:5) and Jeremiah who spoke of

Israel as those who had *"perverted their way and have forgotten the Lord their God."*(Jer.3:21). He saw around him a world that was so unlike the world that his God had sought to make, a world that he would call *the "Kingdom of God"* and to which he was calling and seeking to bring the people into.

It was a vision, it was his cause, it was his life's purpose, and he had gathered a people into a movement, yes, it was a movement to change the way things were, a political movement, a social movement, a religious movement, a call to bring the people Israel, and ultimately the whole world, back to their God. A God whose way was known through healing and restoring hope, in liberation and empowering the powerless, through selfless giving and non-judgmental acceptance and inclusiveness, through caring for one another, for the stranger, the foreigner, the slave, the enemy, and doing it all through love and compassion and non-violence. It was a way so unlike the way of the world around him.

So when he sent his disciples to procure a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem during the celebration of Passover, the time remembering Israel's freedom from Egypt so long ago, celebrating Israel's Independence Day, even while under the occupation of Rome, he didn't do this just so he could have a parade. No, this was serious stuff. This was rebellion! This was fomenting an uprising, sowing the seeds of sedition! This was a threat to the powers that be, the powers of violence and occupation, the powers of hate and fear and "might makes right", of pride and arrogance and corruption and cruelty. As he entered the gates of the city wall that day, he was entering over a threshold into a new way of being, a new way of living, trying to usher in a new social order. This was the threshold into a whole new way of being human!

Of course, no one understood what he was doing. Not his closest followers, not Herod or Pilate, or the Chief Priest or the religious leaders. No one understood. Not until this final week was over and he had crossed over another threshold into another whole way of being.

But what he did that day, and what came of his life, would influence the rest of history. In every century, movements have arisen to change the world in which we live. Groups of individuals moved by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Love and Compassion, have sought to make change, to bring about a better world. We may think of the Abolitionists who sought an end to slavery, of Mahatma Gandhi and the movement for Indian independence, of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement, or of those who sought acceptance and equality for the LGBTQ community. And in our own time, right now, the young people throughout our nation and the movement against gun violence and the epidemic of mass shootings and murder and the culture of violence in our country.

In all of these, and in every movement that seeks to correct and destroy the evils of this world, it is the Spirit of God, the very same Spirit that filled that man Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago, that is at work. It is that Spirit of Christ, that Love of God that so filled him up, that is the cornerstone, that over, and over, and over again is rejected by this world, that cornerstone that is the foundation of our faith, which inspires us and gives us the courage and ability to enter over each new threshold, bringing us closer to that realm of God that Jesus continues to call us to.

In the coming days of this Holy Week, as we gather together, may we allow that Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to enter into us, moving us forward across the next threshold. Amen.