

Caught Up in the Crowd
Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Luke 19:28-44

With Jesus in town, it was going to be a Passover week to remember! Hosanna!

Some say there were at least two and a half million people in Jerusalem that week. They had travelled from all over the Mediterranean Basin. Many of them had heard about Jesus and what he could do. He had already grabbed their imagination by raising Lazarus from the dead. Maybe he would finally proclaim himself the Messiah, then the action would really get started!

It was an emotional time, a time in which it was hard to keep the details straight. We know that by Thursday of that week, the crowds of people who had initially cried out in support of him had begun to cry out against him. The tide was beginning to turn.

Sometimes I wonder if he knew what he was getting into. Was he aware, as his loyal followers secreted him away to a safe house that it would be his last meal with them? Did he know that later on, in a garden, one of those followers would betray him with a kiss so that he might be seized by the authorities? Or that another of his most loyal followers would later deny even knowing him? Hosanna!

Yes, it was a difficult week for Jesus. Before it all would end, he would sweat blood, be abandoned by some of his closest friends, stand trial, be ridiculed, and crucified.

But it was a magnificent week, too. Jesus knew that the greatest use of life is to spend it on something noble and important that will endure forever. Talk about turning the other cheek, blessing those who persecute you, having all kinds of evil uttered against you falsely the way they persecuted the prophets who had gone before--Jesus understood all of it. He didn't just preach about it - he lived it.

He embodied the message he had come to share, the one that says we are called to live, to strive for the things that make for peace. We look back to the sermon on the plain: "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return... be compassionate as your Father is compassionate..." We remember the I look back at the healing stories, two of which end in "your faith has saved you; go in peace." We recall the controversies of sitting down with the tax collectors and the sinners and even the Pharisees. Soon he will sit down with Peter and Judas and feed them and give them the sacrament to remember him by. Perhaps those are the things that make for peace. Hosanna!

Holy week has always been a little confusing to me. Certainly my time living in Jerusalem helped. I walked the same cobblestone street of Via Dolorosa myself every day, stubbing my toes on some of the ones the crowd stumbled upon. Getting the spiritual geography of a place certainly helps me imagine what it might have been like. But what I continue to have a hard time understanding is what could have possibly happened for the tide to turn so quickly! What was it that he did or said to turn so many against him?

Remember that it was a time of great oppression and fear, his people were living under the specter of Rome and its power. They looked to Jesus to change their situation. As our system of governance continues to slowly churn through the issues of pandemic response, racism and gun violence, we can relate. We too are frustrated by partisanship, by the lack of relevant action to address serious problems, by the cowardice of those who are given the responsibilities of making change happen. Maybe we even want to, in the words of my dad, "*Toss the bums out!*"

So I wonder, if something like that is what happened to Jesus. The first part of his week in Jerusalem, he ministered, acted, spoke, and answered questions. Maybe it was something he said, or didn't say, that did him in. Or perhaps it was HOW he said it. The frustrated crowd wanted change, knew that change had to happen, but the path of peace set by Jesus exasperated them.

The Pharisees in the crowd didn't quite understand either. Was he pure enough to carry the title of King that the crowd was bestowing upon him? This man ate with sinners, regularly – that's no way for a religious leader to behave! They heard the crowd calling out and wanted Jesus to silence them. Jesus responded that creation itself cannot be stopped from voicing praise, much less the people surrounding him in the dirty streets.

This Holy Week we start with understanding what Christ can mean to our hurting world... the coming of Shalom. The word shalom is commonly used in Hebrew today as a greeting in the same way we use the words hello and goodbye (not unlike that the Hawaiian greeting 'aloha'). In our Bibles, it is often translated as "peace," but that does not adequately define the original. The root word is actually a verb, 'shalam', which means to make whole. It's a word that not only speaks of peace, but of restoration and wholeness.

So, what the things that make for wholeness today? Loving everyone, in the name of Christ, even as we love ourselves is a start. Caring for those who do not have enough. Reaching out to the least, the last, and the lost. Seeking peace with wholeness and justice for all people.

And though we may be sighing "*Hosanna: Lord Save Us*" today, we also know that we have to take some responsibility to save ourselves. One thing I am very sure of, is that Jesus still weeps... over the city of Boulder. And Atlanta. And Las Vegas. And Sandy Hook. And Orlando. And.... and.... If only we could recognize the things that make for peace.

Most days I doubt we actually want peace on earth, we are so bad at enacting and supporting it. What does the Lord require for Jesus to come? What humble entry can we cede to the Son of God?

I, for one, will be listening to the stones. For the truth cannot be stopped.

"Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord, Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven." Hosanna.¹ Amen.

¹ With thanks to Katy Stenta's prayer, "Palm Sunday: Waiting for the stones"