

Sermon Palm Sunday April 14th 2019

The Ups and Downs of Following Jesus

This morning, we gathered outside with palm branches in hand excited to wave these branches as we walked around the church. We do this every year on Palm Sunday to reflect on the earliest followers of Jesus, and their dedication to follow him. We do this every year to reflect on who Jesus is for us. Our savior. Our leader. We wave palm branches in procession every year to also show our own dedication to follow Jesus.

We follow Jesus, because Jesus gives us hope that we will be lifted up when we find ourselves on the margins of society. Jesus gives us hope that we will live in a society where we all will be treated fairly. Jesus gives us hope that we will live in a society where those living in poverty will be fed and clothed. Jesus gives us hope that when we are limited by our health problems we will experience healing and redemption. Jesus gives us hope that we will live together in a world where peace will overcome violence. Jesus gives us hope that when we face grief and dying we will be given new life.

We follow Jesus, because we believe our world will be a loving place with him as the one who leads and guides us. We follow Jesus, because we believe we will be loving people when he leads and guides us.

As Christians we want to follow Jesus. We want to wave our palm branches in the air thinking of what could be with Jesus as our leader. We want to live our lives every day devoted to Jesus' words. Devoted to imitating Jesus' actions.

We come to All Saints Sunday morning to worship. To feel reenergized by God's Word and Sacrament, so we can be excited and devoted to follow Jesus every day of our lives. So, we can go out into our world equipped to reveal God's love from Monday to Saturday. Not just Sunday.

In our processional gospel this morning, the people who are following Jesus praising him as he enters Jerusalem are excited to follow him. Like us they are hopeful Jesus will lift them up from the margins of society. Like us they are hopeful Jesus will treat them fairly. Like us they are hopeful to be clothed and fed. Like us they are longing to experience healing and

redemption from their pain and sorrow. Like us Jesus' words reenergize them to imitate him every day. They are ready to go anywhere with Jesus.

Then we get to our gospel this morning, and are hit hard with reality. We hear how as the week in Jerusalem goes on the disciples are struggling more and more with staying committed to following Jesus and his message. The disciples hear the gospel, but start to envision the cost. Resistance is getting stronger from those in power. People within the group are starting to doubt. One disciple decides enough is enough and betrays Jesus over to the authorities. Some disciples decide to argue over who has more status. One disciple reverts to violence to protect Jesus from getting arrested. Then Simon Peter Jesus' closest confidant in his attempt to avoid harm denies knowing Jesus on three different occasions.

Suddenly things have taken a nose dive since the celebratory entry in Jerusalem. Now they hide in the crowd as people who once followed Jesus are now mocking him. Then they stand by as the greatest injustice in their time and arguably in all time occurs. Jesus is crucified.

We hear Luke's passion narrative and see the challenges that come with following Jesus. Yes, we are excited. Yes, we try hard to do what Jesus did. Yes, we want to get out there Sunday after church and show people what Jesus can do to make our community a more loving place to be.

Then like the disciples we start to see the cost of following Jesus. We see how hard it is to live up to all Jesus said and did. We end up saying and doing things that hurt those we love. Betraying their trust. We get envious wanting power instead of fairness for those marginalized in our communities. We act out violently, because we feel powerless as we try to change the system. We deny our faith so we can fit in. We even find ourselves mixed up in the injustices that surround us from time to time. It is not easy to follow Jesus. We stumble more often than we want to.

The last week of Jesus' life is a mirror image of every week of our lives. We go out into the world to try and be Jesus' hand and feet. We are excited. Our hearts are devoted, but the cost, the resistance gets in the way. We find ourselves like the disciples standing their looking at Jesus hanging from a cross wondering how we ended up in this place.

Then we get back to Sunday morning, and we reenergize hoping this week will be different. For the disciples Easter morning is their moment where they reenergize after witnessing the empty tomb and the resurrected Christ.

As we dive further into the Easter season we will see that the disciples struggle to follow the resurrected Christ. And so, Jesus will breathe the Holy Spirit on them reenergizing them once again on the day of Pentecost. Throughout our lives Jesus is there reenergizing us when we fall short.

What I love about Luke's version of Jesus' passion narrative is that Luke magnifies Jesus' forgiving nature. Hanging from a cross, Jesus forgives those who are mocking him. Jesus forgives the person who hangs next to him. Jesus reenergizes us.

Because for Jesus, what is most important is that the kingdom of God impacts the world. That we will be living in paradise with him. And the only way to experience this paradise in this world is for us to take seriously his invitation and follow him. Is to trust in his forgiving love. Believing that Jesus reenergizes us for the week ahead.

We gather here this morning to reenergize. To feel empowered to follow Jesus. We confess our sins. We hear the good news that gives us hope. We sing songs to pump us up. We come to the table to be lifted up by God's forgiving love. We share the peace with one another to encourage togetherness and harmony. We walk out of here ready to follow Jesus.

This week we will be invited to join in several opportunities to be reenergized. We will walk with Jesus and his earliest followers from the moment Jesus is anointed in Bethany, to the last meal Jesus shares with his closest friends, to Golgotha, to the empty tomb, to the resurrected Christ. We will walk together this week remembering that Jesus' love and grace lifts us up every time betrayal, pride, violence, denial, and injustice tries to bring us down. Jesus' reenergizing love prevails helping us be the loving and gracious people God created us to be.

Let us pray, loving God, give us the energy and love to follow your son Jesus. When we stumble lift us up with your forgiving love. As we journey with you on this holy week adventure reassure us that you are always there whether we wave our palm branches or stand at the foot of the cross or sit in the empty tomb. **Amen.**