

This is the Psalm Sunday sermon from last year. I am not posting the sermon I delivered this year as I am working with that one for another project.

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

March 28, 2021

“The Lord Needs It”

Rev. Susie Maxwell

Let us pray . . .

You all know I love patterns, rhythms and cycles.

I’ve come to see them as a great source of comfort for when we are lost or disoriented. I believe patterns, rhythms and cycles are in fact the Divine’s way of providing reassurance for when we are in distress or need a map to navigate life. Or a rock to cling to when things are especially hard.

At every moment across the story of life, some kind of pattern can be found to render comfort:

For example, the pattern of every 24 hours reminds us that darkness will always be overcome by light. Or if you've had a rough day, darkness will eventually roll around and soothingly cocoon you.

The tide reminds us that life's floods recede or that when we're parched, the waters will return.

Our own lungs affirm us of a very primal cycle of emptying and filling.

What I mean by all this pattern talk is that God's ways are rhythmical and cyclical and restorative and that just because we might not see the fullness of something during our lifetimes doesn't mean it's not there.

Then in conjunction with patterns I also enjoy discovering or looking at the spirit of what our Sacred texts have to say about the things of God.

Of course “God” is such an enormous word that it very likely means something different to each of us when we utter that sacred naming.

The First or Old Testament is really beautiful in painting the story of God bringing all of creation into being as a “was”, “is” and “on-going” act that has real vibrancy and hope into which we are invited to participate. We might even use the fitting Palm Sunday word that we are invited to *process* with God’s character and being.

I am in love with the Second or New Testament because it shows how Jesus was intentional and God through Jesus Christ is intentional. And through sacred intentionality, we bring about the nearness of God. And moving through the world and engaging with all of creation — especially each other — engaging in purposeful ways is how we embody God, or how we live out mercy, goodness, justice, love and any other beautiful God-related words you can come up with.

The point is, we have an actively intentional Creator.

And this morning's lesson is ripe with intentionality as Jesus brings everything into focus as he makes his entry into Jerusalem, behaving like a King:

To begin with, Jesus tells his disciples to untie and bring him a colt, and they do so without question. If they are pressed, they are to exercise *his* authority.

Furthermore, he asks for a Colt that “no one has ridden” and this too is a Kingly claim.

Commentators remind us that an unriden colt would have been unneutered and untrained and that riding an unbroken colt would have been dangerous — which is the exact opposite of what a conqueror would ride — a trained and seasoned war horse.

Also, Jesus comes into Jerusalem in a new way - with a new ride,

through the opposite entrance associated with Kings, bringing as the Pulpit Fiction gang says, “an untamed, and unknown way of doing things.”

And this is why I love Palm Sunday because it is so ripe with intentionality. Here comes Jesus and the message is cued up and fully charged because when we are connected to God and driven by that Spirit?

What else is there to do except follow it and perhaps have a parade.

And shout Hosanna!

“Hosanna!” is an intense emotional verbal expression, and while it was originally a cry for help, in the context of Jesus’ procession, it was a cry of happiness.

The cry for help was answered when God sent Jesus into the world.

The cry of happiness was — and still should and could be — for Jesus and the saving ways of his teachings.

So if we circle back to the idea of patterns, I think this morning's text lays out the Spirit of a divine pattern. Listen to some of the Gospel writer's declarations that you may have noticed as Meri read for us:

approaching

will find

They went

They told

they brought

those who went ahead and those who followed

Then he entered

These are all very intentional actions. While part of the language is certainly Mark's way of writing, I also think it's part of a bigger Spirit that tells us in the ongoing act of God in the world that we can approach,
we can find,
we can go and tell and bring,
we can go ahead or we can follow as all these ways help create an entry for God's ways . . . with the heart of this text located in verse 3.

This is when Jesus tells his disciples how to handle any potential pushback that might come around as they retrieve the colt.

Listen again to the verse:

If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' ”

Does that grab your attention? It sure grabs mine. Is Jesus' intentional guidance here perhaps the pattern of a lifetime?

Why are you doing this?

The Lord needs it.

And then perhaps in a stunning theological twist, Mark adds this nugget to chew on *and will send it back here immediately.*

Beloveds, this lesson is perhaps a teaching and a pattern to keep us from getting too lost or disoriented when it comes to God. I say "too lost" or disoriented because the hard truth is, any sincere faith journey will find us lost now and then. But maybe the constant hope lies in leaning into the sacred question:

Why are you doing this?

And in answering the question, is it something that God needs?

And could it be that God needs you?

Jesus knew why he was entering Jerusalem. He knew why he orchestrated all that he did. It's because God needed his help in showing the world what a real Kingdom looked like. Of course, the Roman Empire was fearful of the disturbance that Jesus caused and in the end they would use an awful lot of violence in attempt to crush this Spirit.

Jesus knew that as well.

But the the thing about truth is that it can never be destroyed. Just as the tide comes and goes, your own heart lubs and dubs, and winter gives way to spring, while the truth might get crucified, the truth will rise again because the things of God are eternal.

And so as we enter Holy Week, my prayer is that you imagine Jesus riding his colt through the center of your being, reminding us of God's divine stories and patterns that desire and need our participation.

And I especially pray that you remember that just because this triumphal story has come and gone some 2,000+ years now, it doesn't mean that the truth of God's message is some distant memory.

You're here this morning with me. And we'll do it again next week, and on and on in a pattern across our shared lives.

Why are you doing this?

Because the Lord needs it.

Hosanna in the highest!