

**“This Isn't What it Looks Like: The Triumphal Entry”**

A Palm Sunday Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron  
April 5, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

***Matthew 21:1-11***

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”*

<sup>4</sup> *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

<sup>5</sup> *“Say to Daughter Zion,*

*‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”*

<sup>6</sup> *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,*

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

<sup>10</sup> *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”*

<sup>11</sup> *The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

This isn't what it looks like.

We hear that phrase said in a variety of circumstances. It's usually said when someone stumbles upon an awkward situation that makes people raise their eyebrows in curiosity or accusation. Or, people will say something like this when

they are trying to get themselves out of an awkward situation, or avoid getting themselves into trouble. A word of explanation is needed for why something isn't what it looks like. My son once said it as I entered the kitchen to find him eating the last of a birthday cake – that wasn't his. Although in that case it was exactly what it looked like – he was eating the cake. There really wasn't any getting away from that.

On Palm Sunday, this phrase could easily have been uttered as Jesus arrived in Jerusalem to a cheering crowd, waving palm branches and laying their cloaks on the road.

It looks like a parade of welcome and celebration.

It looks like the arrival of deeply respected royalty.

It looks like the coming together of the hopes and dreams of generations of God's people.

It looks like a people so excited by the arrival of their Saviour they simply could not contain their joy.

To a point, it is exactly what it looks like. It was wildly enthusiastic. It was, no doubt, a loud, chaotic jumble of voices. People were pushing to get to the front so they could see. Those who saw the crowd gathering were drawn to the excitement to see what all the fuss was about. They asked who it was that was receiving such a joyous, boisterous welcome. Was it a king? A hero?

“Who is this?” The response may have surprised them.

This is a prophet. It's Jesus, the prophet, the one from Nazareth.

He's different. He's the one we've been hearing about and waiting for.

He's finally here!

And the excitement kept building. And the crowd kept growing. And the disciples kept following. And Jesus stayed humble.

Jesus knew this was exactly what it looked like. It was a crowd of people so moved by their excitement that they had missed the point. Many in that crowd didn't even know what was going on – they had simply been drawn into the party. This was a crowd that didn't know him, or understand why it was such a big deal that he was entering the city, or what would happen in a short few days. This was a crowd that wanted him to be what they thought he would be. This was a crowd that was going to be disappointed.

For the crowd, this wasn't what it looked like.

For Jesus, this was exactly what it looked like.

It was the beginning of a week that would change everything.

Have you even come across people staring at something, pointing at whatever has grabbed their attention? It's almost impossible not to look, isn't it? Our own curiosity wants to know what's going on. We are compelled to look in the direction the others are pointing. What is so interesting? What is so exciting? And

so we look. Sometimes it is something worth stopping for. Sometimes we can't figure out what the others are looking at. Sometimes it's a prank and people are testing to see how many others they can get to look. We look, hoping it will be something that will make our day better, or at least give us a reason to smile or be amazed. Sometimes we walk away feeling we were duped into looking for something that wasn't there, or that wasn't worth the effort.

I wonder if that's how the people felt when they realized Jesus wasn't what they wanted him to be. Disappointed. Frustrated. Let down. He wasn't the great warrior. He wasn't going to overthrow the government. He wasn't going to destroy the people that oppressed them. And so as quickly as the excitement had built about his arrival, the bitterness took its place.

Their cries of celebration turned to cries for crucifixion.

Their joy turned to anger.

Their hope turned to hate.

Even the disciples didn't know what to think.

They marvelled at the welcome he had received.

They ran away from the danger of his arrest.

The devoted Peter denied he even knew Jesus.

They hid in fear.

They abandoned their Master.

The triumph of Jesus entering the city wasn't what it looked like.

But Jesus knew. This was exactly what it looked like. It was exactly what it had to be. It looked like the fulfilment of all that had been foretold by the prophets. It looked like the beginning of his ultimate purpose coming to its fulfilment. It looked like the continuing story – his story – that had to play out, no matter how hard it would be.

This isn't what it looks like. Or maybe it is.

It is Jesus' welcome by an exuberant crowd.

It is hope made visible.

It is the beginning of a week of highs and lows; joy and betrayal; and prophecies fulfilled.

This week we will travel with Jesus into the heart of his story. And his story is our story, because we know how the rest of the story goes. We know where this all leads. We know that this celebration as Jesus enters Jerusalem is nothing compared to the indescribable joy that will come with the empty tomb.

We also know what we have to endure before we get there; what he will endure. But we will endure. Even in this time when we cannot gather in person, together we will see this journey through. We will walk with each other, hearts connected by our hope and our faith in the truth of this story. We will move

through this week connected to Jesus by the presence of his Spirit. We will see our hope realized God reminds us once again:

*that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

This isn't what it looks like. Or maybe it is.

We will have to hear the rest of the story to find out.

Amen.