

EIGHT DAYS THAT ROCKED THE WORLD

A sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Nadene Grieve-Deslippe on March 28, 2010
Crossroads United Church

Psalm 31: 9-16

Luke 19:28-40

It has been said that familiarity breeds contempt. While this may be true I would also suggest that familiarity breeds malaise and apathy. When things become routine and rote we may become less inclined to pay particular attention to the minutia of detail. Many of the traditions of religious holidays have taken on a larger than life persona. The baby in the manger never cries, as I am sure that Mary did not travail in labour to give him life. The cross has been glorified to the point where it is no longer seen as an instrument of pain and torture but the means of painless grace. We have become quite accustomed in the church on Palm Sunday to watching our children process down the aisle and wave palm branches and shout hosanna! But if we pay particular attention to the account of the triumphal entry as recorded by Luke we see that there is no reference at all to palm branches. Neither is there any mention of a single hosanna being uttered.

In the Lukan account of the triumphal entry and the launch of Holy Week we discover that rather than waving branches, the people divest themselves of their cloaks so that the donkey walks upon a carpet of clothing. And rather than shouting hosanna the throng of adoring disciples shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven." The reference is made, not to a madding throng of manic townspeople, but to disciples and I am left wondering if the group was perhaps a little smaller in number than we usually assume as we revisit the story annually. It reads as though it was more than twelve, but does it presume the multitudes that we often imagine?

Recall the number of movies produced and we often see Jesus being hailed by hundreds. It would appear that Luke describes a scene which is less crowded and more

subdued. In Luke's version of the story no crowds waving palm branches and shouting hosannas greet Jesus as they might a general returning victorious from battle, or someone who has come to wage war on their behalf. Instead, people cushion Jesus' ride with their own clothing, divesting themselves of the symbols of their status instead of putting on the trappings of war. Palms were waved at parades and festivals with nationalistic overtones, and Luke does not want this event to carry any such implication. There is no reference to David or Davidic throne. Jesus is simply being honoured and praised by his followers- not for what lies ahead but- for the deeds of power that he has performed.

We in the church have taken the accounts of the triumphal entry and merged them all together much like we do at Christmas with the shepherds from Luke merged with the magi from Matthew. But Luke seems to be very intentional to make the triumphal entry more an act of devotion than a coronation; it is celebratory and not political. We see the humility of Jesus and the adoration of the crowd who do not fully comprehend the messiahship of Jesus. And Fred Craddock in his commentary makes a distinction between the followers who praised Jesus as he rode on the donkey and those who later demanded his execution. These are not one and the same. Writes Craddock "His disciples did not fully understand his messiahship but neither are they persons who sing praise and scream death the same week." (Craddock-1990-227). So it appears that according to Luke the triumphal entry may have been more of a ripple than a wave, with no hosannas or palms or necessarily even as large a crowd as we have been led to believe. Does this change the significance for us?

If the triumphal entry of Jesus was more of a ripple than a wave it need not detract from the story. He arrives in the city that is associated with being the very seat of Judaism in humility and gentleness. He does not ride a noble steed that would command attention. Neither does he wear armor or carry a sword- long held as symbols of the conquering hero. The gentle king arrives in his capital with no obvious means of defense or offense; vulnerable to whatever it is his enemies will choose to do to him.

And if there is a lesson that needs to be imprinted on our very soul it is this image of the gentle king who comes in peace.

Remember the image of the gentle king surrounded by adoring fans when he is denied and betrayed by his hand chosen disciples.

Remember the image of the gentle king astride a donkey with cloaks strewn in his path when he is stripped almost naked and made to wear a cloak of mockery.

Remember the gentle king who arrives in humility when he breaks the bread and offers the cup of sacrifice so that we might not forget.

And when the one betrays you that you thought was your friend remember the gentle king who was similarly betrayed.

And when all of your friends desert you in fear and side with the majority who do not see the whole truth, remember the gentle king who beseeched his disciples to stay awake and pray.

In the eight days that rocked the world between the triumphal entry and the resurrection of Easter we will be reminded of humanity at its worst. And the actions of those will be redeemed by the love of God in Christ.

The musical Man of La Mancha tells the story of a delusional old man named Don Quixote who becomes so disillusioned with the debauchery of the world that he descends into madness and imagines himself a knight. A prostitute named Aldonza becomes his lady Dulcinea. For a brief moment Aldonza dares to see herself as Don Quixote sees her- not as a trick turning guttersnipe but as a lady. Reality intercedes and she is wounded by the dream and brought back to stinging reality and she says to the delusional old man, "Take the clouds from your eyes and see me as I really am!"

Remove from your memory all of the layers of myth that the church has placed upon the pageantry of the passion. There were no palms; no hosannas; probably not a huge crowd. There were disciples who did not fully comprehend who Jesus was or the meaning of messiahship. And when the madding crowd cried out for his death they cried out for his life, but the majority muted their fewer voices. Take the clouds from your eyes and see him as he truly is: a gentle king who arrives in the city not in pomp and circumstance but in humility. And dare to lay down your cloak and experience eight days that rocked the world in agony and ecstasy. Amen.