



TOUCH POINT

Untying the Colt of Peace – Touchpoint for March 20, 2024

Mark 11:1-11 (NRSVUE) Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

11 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this: ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

I am blown away by the courage of Jesus as a human being. His love changed people and his humility changed the world forever. He regularly took time for contemplation. He continually went away to a place of solitude as a practice.

I believe it is in contemplation that we experience fresh understanding and receptivity to the movements of our hearts. Here is how spiritual director and activist, Adam Bucko, describes contemplation:

“What was my contemplative practice? My contemplative practice is to become aware of everything that is alive in me, both the joys, the heartbreaks, you name it... simply gather that, bring it to God, and sit there in a state of receptivity and listening, inviting God to hold me. And just sitting there in a state of curious not-knowing, consenting to whatever work God wanted to do in my life.”

Listen to the last sentence again: “Consenting to whatever work God wanted to do in my life.” It is through the work that God is doing in our lives that we discover what, in the world, breaks our hearts. It is in this moment of receptivity and non-judgmental love that we are moved to action. A move to action may be perceived as a threat to egos, but never a threat to lives. In contemplation, there is not a command, but an invitation to entertain what disturbs us. That is where our love-inspired movement into action begins.

Jesus took dramatic action for a people that wouldn't listen to his words. He went to Jerusalem frequently. We can assume this because his good friends, Mary and Martha, and his friend Joseph of Arimathea, lived there.

Regarding Jerusalem, Jesus said he longed to gather the people together “like a hen gathers its chicks,” but they would not listen. Here Jesus is taking action, sending a clear message in dramatic fashion. Perhaps this time the people would be compelled to see what they would not hear.

Jesus rode in on a donkey and it turns into a palm-waving event.

Simultaneously, another procession was taking place in town. Jesus probably didn't just spontaneously start a procession of his own. Surely he was aware of the planned Roman procession. The people in Jerusalem were frightened and hopeless. Oddly enough, there were a lot more of them than there were people in power, presumably not frightened, not hopeless. Augustus, like many other rulers, knew that based on their sheer numbers, they might organize in rebellion, and that could do serious damage to their power and privilege. So, Augustus and his Roman henchmen said things like we hear today: There will be a bloodbath if you don't keep me in power.

Military processions happened often, to let the people know of the overwhelming strength this imperial government had, should the people get any ideas about organizing and protesting. This danger to their control compelled emperors to conduct these processions to discourage any thoughts of a unified protest and resistance.

Jesus rode in on a donkey colt. They shouted, “Hosanna!”

According to scholars, the word “Hosanna!” is translated as ‘Save Us Now!’ Rather than praise for Jesus, it was a cry for God to break through. The action Jesus took was an alternative to hate, conquest, and revenge. His action was a courageous act of will, for peace.

We see it around the world and now specifically in our country. The oppressed usually outnumber the oppressor by massive numbers. Some don't even know they are the oppressed. They don't respond with shouts of ‘Hosanna, save us now.’ There are shouts of destruction. Why would they shout, “Hosanna!” when they are misguidedly enabling the oppressors?

This was the very purpose of a Roman procession.

This is how the Reverend Alexis Lillie of the Church of the Village describes a Roman procession:

“It was a protest to counteract the imperial marches of Rome. To stand over and against the domination system that was all too common and is all too common. A system where power and wealth were concentrated with a relative few and oppression and extortion flowed to most everyone else. And it was a protest to stand against imperial theology – Augustus, the emperor of Rome, was a son of god and had his own divine mythology surrounding him. So, in the end, I guess the way I was taught Palm Sunday wasn't entirely wrong. It was triumphal in the sense that... the story triumphs! Here we are, still talking about Jesus on a donkey.”

I'm going to steal one of her subsequent questions and ask it of us.

She asks,

“Who are you in the crowd?”

What are your fears, your bouts with hopelessness about? Would you have been a planner or a supportive marcher? Would you have thought, ‘this will never work’? Are you the donkey or one perched from a high spot to get a better view, yet safe from being recognized? Would you have had plans to be at the other procession, but afraid to leave the emperor's parade?

I hope I would've been a palm-waving participant, but I might have been a food vendor.

Jesus rode in on a donkey. The average height of a donkey colt is 11 hands. If there are any donkey handlers in the bunch please correct me, but I believe that is equal to about 3-1/2 feet. Just imagine Jesus writing a donkey colt 3-1/2 feet off the ground. When I think about it, it seems a little comical to me. Jesus occasionally dragging his feet on the ground and pulling them up, palm branches waving downward, people putting their coats on the ground. But perhaps this is what Jesus wanted! A complete contrast to the military might is the power that rides in on peace.

Perhaps this was why Jesus told his apprentices to take nothing with them. They would need the help of others... places to sleep and food to eat. The needing, and serving those needs, would unify people along the way. They would not have tools of transaction or the temptation to respond to people with weapons. He was teaching them to ride in on a donkey of peace and the power of humility as well as action. Sharing and valuing others, asking for assistance, instead of seeing others as a threat, was the biggest blow to political and religious displays of might.

What we are witnessing today in Christian nationalism is similar and frightening. The temptation is to strike back with the same tools Christian nationalists and white supremacists use: misinformation and fear-based propaganda.

Jesus rode in on a donkey.

The King of Love rode in on a donkey. "Hosanna, Jesus!" The King who received power from above didn't need to wield it or be a blow hard.

"Though in very nature God, he did not see equality with God as something to be grasped but lowered himself even into the role of servant."

Jesus rode in on a donkey. "Hosanna, Jesus!"

But if we've learned anything from our time in communion where broken meets broken, Jesus shared his consequential punishment and death as an act of humility. Humility is the only act that will save.

Jesus displayed actions of peace. Humility was the example for all of us. Courageous acts.

The bullied do not benefit from our contemplative silence. The immigrants do not benefit from our silence. Victims of racism do not benefit from silence. If it were so, Jesus would not have exposed himself in the planning of the procession. Arranging a donkey rental, and palm branches instead of weaponry. Palm branches were a symbol for victory, triumph, peace, and eternal life.

"Hosanna!"

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him... 1) Silent and lifeless 2) Alone and forlorn
3) Broken and helpless... crowned with a garland of thorns
4) As son and as brother 5) Related to all
6) Through the grief of a mother... hurting the most of all
7) As healer and teacher 8) As helper and friend
9) As prophet and preacher... Ignore Him? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(“Our Father,” Taizé Reflections)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.

Amen.