

Marion weekly update

SERMON March 24, Turning the Tide, Luke 19:28-44

This week we are in familiar territory for most of us. Palm Sunday is a celebration that people look forward to in the Christian year. The question each year because it's so familiar is "how do we keep the message fresh?" Not new and modern. Fresh. Not updated for the sake of convenience. Fresh. This distinction is important. There are stories that are timeless and teach valuable lessons as well as preserving valuable history. Our challenge is that when they become overly familiar they can lose their punch. Some of the most significant stories become white noise because not only do we think we fully know them, but in that comfort we can believe we've fully assimilated their messages into our lives.

As imperfect beings, the chances of this are pretty slim. Today once again we consider what is known as the triumphal entry into Jerusalem beginning the last week of Jesus' life. This is a week that Jesus knows will be a game changer even if no one else did.

The symbolism of His entry is rich and telling. Jesus comes into the city in the tradition of a Davidic king. He is met to celebration, honor, and cries that reveal the hope He represents to the people. He is their Savior. A Savior that will restore the greatness of Israel and put an end to the oppression of the Romans. This makes Him a political figure of sorts and they welcome Him as such.

His entry is reminiscent of a known political procession in their day. The term for it was Parousia, though it looked different in some ways for reasons we'll look at in a moment. We also see this term Parousia used to describe Jesus' second coming. As we unpack what it references it holds significant implications for how people interpret some common "end times" theology. I offer that just for your thinking. If you're curious it's likely better a conversation rather than a sermon.

This political practice involved a visiting king, emperor, or high ranking dignitary. The upper crust of the city would come out first followed by more common citizens to greet the dignitary outside the city. The purpose was to show them honor and lead them into their destination. This looks very similar to what the people did as Jesus entered the city. He is being honored as the dignitary that He is. The difference is that not everyone saw Him that way. The religious leaders didn't think so. The Romans didn't much care as the idea of a Messiah was Jewish, not Roman. But the common people? That was who saw Him and came to greet Him. These are the ones who laid down their coats and waved the branches. The met the King and ushered Him into the city.

Timing is everything. Pontius Pilate would likely have been arriving in a similar time frame. He too would be welcomed. He would have a military entourage. He was coming in a show of force to make sure the Jews didn't get any wise ideas of revolting during Passover. Jesus makes a statement that however Pilate, the representative of Rome, enters, his is not the ultimate authority. He represents an earthly king. Jesus is the King of Kings.

Though He comes in peacefully there is a powerful message sent. The tables of power are turning. Caesar may have authority over your life, but it is God through Christ who has authority over your soul. Even Jesus' greatest supporters didn't fully grasp this yet. Everyone saw Him as the conqueror. Still, the message that would become clearer in hindsight on the heels of Easter was being sent.

The next day Jesus goes in and flips the tables in the Temple. This isn't some rage fueled temper tantrum. He is making a statement and setting Himself up. He sets Himself up because the message He spoke may have been prickly in terms of allegiance to God over Caesar, but it also was teaching to love your enemies, pray for those who use you, and advocating for love over violence. Putting this kind of disruptive action behind those words was the tipping point to give the Romans a reason to crucify Him. The message? The tide is turning. The religious leaders had flipped the purpose of faith and worship upside down. It was a way to control. The High Priest was picked by Rome for in large purpose keeping a rebellious Jewish people in check. It was time to flip the purpose of faith and worship where it is intended to be. Drawing near to God, honoring God as ruler of all and putting any other allegiance a

distant second, third, or hundredth place lower. Listen to the call of God, and if the call of Caesar is different then Caesar takes a back seat.

Through the coming days Jesus is confronted by religious leaders and their minions publicly. Over and over He takes their challenges and sends them away looking foolish. The people who had misrepresented faith to the people, intentionally or not, were being corrected. Here was a man who not only dared to disagree or challenge, but could back up His understanding faithfully and solidly. Even at threat to His person and life the example is set that holding fast to God's way is better than knuckling under to manipulations by the religious forces that be.

At the end of the week he sets the ultimate, extreme example. Some things are worth dying for. Even if everyone around misunderstands, some things require great sacrifice with the faith that ultimately the messaging that has been misunderstood will become clear.

This is what happens. The game changes. The disciples on the heels of the resurrection understand what Jesus was getting at. They see Him as the spiritual Redeemer He had been trying to get them to see all along. The Messiah of violence and conquest is now seen as the Messiah of grace, peace, love, and winning the world through these means rather than force and coercion. It's a long slog towards the Kingdom of God being realized here in the world, but should it be realized it will be lasting because it's been done the right way. By bring all people together in unity under Christ and His way.

The early church was an example of this love. It spread the correct way. Through the example of a communal love that was interested in a common greater good. Not power and the trappings of some earthly ruler. Unfortunately that changed. The great tragedy of being made into a state religion is that it gives the leaders ease, power, and wealth. It ties them to the political engine of their day. Ultimately it corrupts. And we have been fighting against it every since.

Even today there is messaging that has become assumed Christian doctrine or belief that is simply wrong. It has been tied to politics and poisoned as a result. Challenging long held beliefs, even if those beliefs need challenged, is seen as dangerous because Christians can defend their ideas aggressively, violently, cruelly, and even violently. Does this sound like a familiar reality? It sounds eerily similar to what Jesus was working with in His day. Remember, the feathers He ruffled weren't so much the ones in the surrounding nonbelieving community. They were the ones in His own religious group.

We need to turn the tide again. We need to sift through our own beliefs and see where culture and politics have crept in and perhaps moved us away from the central truths of Jesus. The youth are unpacking the Sermon on the Mount in Sunday School right now. There is much about Christianity today that's forgotten Jesus' lessons in this famous sermon. Then we live it out.

The first place we need to get things back on track is with our own. Jesus was working on it with His people, the Jews. Christians are now in that same place with Christianity. Most of us have believing friends. So how do we turn the tide? We become unafraid to have the hard conversations. We challenge what needs challenged. We live our vision and truth out with integrity. Which means we live it out firmly planted and at the same time in kindness, compassion, grace, and love.

Jesus began the work in His ministry. He made an exclamation point with the events beginning on Palm Sunday. He trusted that the ones He took time to instruct so dearly at the Last Supper would figure out the message and use it to transform their world. Rather than a quick fix trying to force His way Jesus saw the long haul picture. I encourage us to follow His example. Act in faith, trusting that we are part of a chain that extends through history, past to now and to tomorrow. If we do our job to make our link strong, the future will be bright because it will be rooted in the honesty and integrity of Christ.