

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
Rev. Howard K. Bell
March 20, 2016 – Palm Sunday
The Journey

As we reflect today on this climactic journey of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, we will explore the location, the people and the activities that are involved with this Palm Sunday story. We will also allow ourselves to glimpse into the events that follow Palm Sunday during Holy Week. I encourage you to not only think about these activities as past events in long ago history, but to think about the events that are occurring in your life today; in your faith journey; in the journey of this faith community; and in how we might all experience Holy Week 2016 in ways that enrich our lives and enrich this faith community.

Biblical Commentator Kathryn M. Matthews, in speaking of today's Palm Sunday text from Luke, says: *"This week's passage kicks off, if you will, the holiest of weeks for Christians. There is no "off-season" for being a follower of Jesus; it's an everyday thing, week in and week out, 24/7. Not just Sunday, not just holy days and not just when we're in church or when we're praying. Being a Christian is an every-day, every moment, all-of-our-lives journey."*¹

I wonder how many of us could truly make this statement about being a follower of Jesus 24/7 and being on an "every moment" "all of our lives" journey? Most all of you in this beloved faith community give graciously of your gifts of time, talent and treasure. Many of you are regular in worship. Many of you add to our worship with your gifts of singing, reading, welcoming, ushering, serving coffee and treats, and counting the Sunday offering. Others of you serve on boards and committees and many in leadership roles. This Interim Ministry year has significantly increased the time demands for so many of you with all church forums, small groups, surveys, and multiple meetings and discussion times. "Thanks Be to God" for all of you and for the commitments you have made on this faith journey. May we continue to strive toward being an every-day follower of Jesus.

In today's New Testament text, Holy Week begins with specific preparations for the journey into Jerusalem. The preparations include Jesus again demonstrating that he could predict the future. He not only predicts the place where they would find a donkey "in the village opposite" (Luke 19:30), but he also predicts the exact question that the disciples will be asked by the owners of the donkey. And everything occurred just as he had said it would.

He had also gathered a multitude of disciples to accompany him into the city. I had always remembered that the crowds on Palm Sunday were made up of all the Jewish people who had gathered in the city of Jerusalem for Passover – and that is certainly true. However, Luke's Gospel clearly identifies that the multitude of disciples accompanying Jesus on the journey were people who had observed his ministry of healing, had heard his teachings, had witnessed his miracles, had been following Jesus on his journey across the Galilean

¹ Sermon Seeds March 20, 2016, UCC

countryside and back in his home town of Nazareth. Obviously, many Jewish people, including Jewish leaders, had been drawn to discover Jesus, possibly having left the city and then returned. But a multitude of disciples were traveling with him.

Today's text reads, *"As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen..."* (Luke 19: 37) Even by the end of today's Palm Sunday text, Jesus has not yet entered the gates of the city. He is still descending down the Mount of Olives outside of the city.

Today's text concludes with a most interesting account of a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees. The loud voices of the multitude concerned the Pharisees. They seemingly wanted to enter more quietly and not bring so much attention to their entry. They even suggested to Jesus that he might rebuke the multitude for shouting. Jesus's response is: *"I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."* (Luke 19: 40).

Commentator, H. Stephen Shoemaker, says: *"Luke's Gospel alone records these thrilling, faith-filled words...Here is faith in the sure triumph of God...here is a truth too good to have its mouth shut... here is a prophetic warning...injustice will not long prevail. The very stones of the house built on corruption "will cry out from the wall."*²

Clearly these words indicate the clarity that Jesus had about the purpose for his journey into Jerusalem. Shoemaker continues: *"...Jesus has planned a highly ritualized symbolic prophetic act...So we have a clash of kingdoms: Caesar or Christ. Caesar's kingdom is based on domination and ruthless power, the kind of kingship Jesus refused when tempted in the wilderness. The kingdom of God Jesus preached is based on justice, mercy, and the love of God."*³

Luke 19: 41 reads. *"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it."* Jesus knew that his entry into Jerusalem, while marked by triumph on Palm Sunday, must proceed to confront the corruption and the injustice that prevailed in both the religious and the political rulers in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that he was must speak out for the poor and the needy. Luke 19:45 reads: *"And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, 'It is written, my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.'" According to many scholars today, it was this act of Jesus that led the religious and political authorities to kill him.*

Commentator, Edith Rasell, provides this insight: *...Jesus' concern was not the commercial activity itself but the exploitation that was embedded within it, activities that were conducted by the Jewish authorities and which took place in the temple and elsewhere...So Jesus' actions in the temple were not only religious. Jesus was also taking action to oppose the major economic and political institution of his day."*⁴

² Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

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⁴ Sermon Seeds March 20, 2016, UCC

What preparations have you made for the journey of Holy Week 2016? What preparations have we made as a community? During this Lenten Season – particularly during the Lenten Souper Wednesday series, you have been given opportunities to look at others who are outside of our faith community. We have heard about special needs of those in our greater community who are refugees; those immigrants who are experiencing incarceration and deportation; homeless youth; people of color in Minnesota; and our neighbors who practice the faith of Islam. Please consider in your hearts and minds, how, in the future, we might, as individuals and as a faith community, improve our outreach to these communities in need and to others with whom we are already engaged through our outreach ministries.

During this Lenten Season, we have also explored during our Sunday morning worship experiences, the topic of forgiveness.

It is my hope and prayer that the energy that we have expended in the past by holding on to resentment, even with others in this church or who have left this church, might be released. It is my hope that we might use this new energy to increase our care for one another. It is my hope that, as we prepare to select and welcome a new settled pastor into our midst, we might also attract others into our church by the witness of our life and ministry together and by the witness of the spirit with which we gather.

There is much in our world today over which Jesus might weep today. We need to journey with Jesus during Holy Week 2016 in order to increase our commitment to better meet the needs of the poor today; to increase our understanding of the root causes of injustice in our world today; to hear the stones that cry out today proclaiming the God's reign of peace and love rather than the world's reign of power and might. Only then may we be ready for Easter morning and the mysterious empty tomb. May it be so. Amen.