

“The Things That Make for Peace”  
Sermon by Oby Ballinger  
Palm Sunday  
Edina Morningside Community Church; March 28, 2021

**Luke 19:29-44**

*When [Jesus] had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”*

*As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”*

Hannah Allam, a reporter from NPR, [profiled two distant cousins](#) for the Consider This podcast a few days ago. One man is Cody, who is twenty-four years old, lives in Virginia, and is an active member of a militia related to the Three Percenters. Cody is an amateur genealogist, and he discovered that he was related to Andrew through a shared German settler several centuries ago. Andrew is thirty-one years old, a music producer living in Los Angeles, a Black Lives Matter activist and a self-identified anti-fascist. Cody reached out to Andrew on social media, and what started with skepticism and judgment about each other has continued into an enduring connection. Cody tells the reporter, “He knows what I do. I know what he does. At the end of the day, we're still cousins. ...He'll talk to me about his reparations march. And I'll talk to him about, you know, the gun lobby.” There is tension between their identities, but they have grown by learning about someone on the other side of social divisions, discovering a genuine respect and friendship with each other. The two met up in person after the violence of January 6th at the nation's capital, both aware that their ancestors may have fought on opposite sides of the Civil War, and both trying to find a different way forward in this century. It isn't all kumbaya as they talk about militias and what's needed for Black liberation, but bridge-building is an alternative to stereotypes and violence. Andrew says, “I know there's something here as far as just finding that common ground and building off of it.” Is this one of the things that make for peace?

When Jesus looks on Jerusalem at the beginning of his final week, he weeps. He knows what is to come, sees the true cost of violent systems, and he laments, “If you...had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” This peace he speaks of is not that social control called “Pax Romana”, a Roman “peace” enforced by the sword. This left in place deep and violent hierarchies between the wealthy, powerful few, and the great many more who were poor and vulnerable, who lived or died at the indifferent whim of those in control. Elites in Jerusalem were in cahoots with the Roman occupying forces, and they feared unrest more than they cared about justice, so they welcomed further troops into Jerusalem to quell sentiments of liberation which are at the heart of the Passover festival. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he sees a city with barricades and armored personnel, designed to control people and

defend an unjust, unloving hierarchy. He sees all the things that do not make for lasting peace. No wonder Jesus weeps.

What causes us to weep this day, and leaves us with no peace? Americans are alienated from each other by willful disinformation and the physical isolation from neighbors that's needed right now for safety, so stereotypes too easily become stand-ins for actual relationships. Housing becomes ever more unaffordable, leading to encampments of vulnerable and homeless people. Gun violence destroys the fabric of communities in mass shootings, and the fabric of families every single day in domestic violence and suicides. Our warming planet reveals the worsening consequences of carbon pollution with increasing disasters like tornados, wildfires, droughts, and floods. Arbitrary immigration laws create refugee camps, reward smugglers, and rend children from parents in the name of national sovereignty. Human beings are pitted against each other according to where we live, how we identify, what we look like, how we pray, and how we love.

This is no accident; there are people who profit from such unholy things. Some elected officials, partisan media, and corporate executives sustain and defend these inhumane, sinful, and heartbreaking arrangements because the status quo of fear and division is more lucrative for them than doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. We hear in their platitudes and accommodations the voice of the Pharisees to pipe down, a self-serving push for maintaining order in the face of urgent liberation. It's all enough to cause us to give up, to surrender hopes for true peace, and that cynical surrender is the goal. Yet when we fail to pursue the things that make for peace, violence takes its place. And if the followers of Jesus become so numbed that we are silent, then even the stones will cry out for justice until we again follow the ways of Christ.

Palm Sunday's promise is that Jesus is never deterred by the powers that be. Knowing full well the forces arrayed in Jerusalem, and that ever *can* be arrayed, Jesus enacts a ritual that evokes royalty and leads his disciples to generous praise. Remember at his birth how the angels announced Jesus' arrival to the shepherds? "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" All of Jesus' healing, teaching and ministry have been about the things of God's peace. And today, the Prince of Peace rides into Jerusalem—not on a warhorse but on a colt—in the company of disciples who honor his enactment of divine peace. In other gospels the disciples spread palm branches before Jesus, and here they spread their cloaks on the ground. They don't have extra coats at home, or a washing machine to clean them afterward, which makes all the more touching their over-the-top gesture of care and honor, rolling out the red carpet to welcome the ways of peace this Savior will bring.

These disciples show us what it means to follow Jesus, giving fully from our lives to herald the incoming rider, the way of God's peace. Disciples of this same Jesus have paved the ways of peace with acts of justice and compassion throughout human history. Rev. Dr. Veronice Miles sees in the host of disciples across time, "the women and men who provided safe passage on the Underground Railroad for persons seeking freedom from chattel slavery in the United States... Remember also Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others in the Confessing Church in the 1930s, who took a definitive stance that their loyalty was to Jesus as Lord, not to Hitler and the Nazis. Youths in South Africa stood against apartheid and formed the African National Congress Youth League in 1944 under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, envisioning a world in which racial domination would no longer exist." ([Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide](#)) In our own day we could point to others who proclaim the Prince of Peace in sacred uprisings to create healing in the wake of anti-Black violence, and in movements to protect water, land and people for generations to come. Humanity throughout history and even the stones at the foundations will cry out—all of creation vibrates with the truth that God's peace and justice will prevail. Remembering this, we hold to the possibility of holy peace in times of unholy division. We invite the things that make for peace to rule in our hearts, minds and lives. We go through the world as peacemakers, as disciples of Christ and his peace that passes all understanding.

In this way we go from the Palm Sunday processions of life to the more somber parts of the rest of Holy Week, turning the corner from praise to foreboding. We can endure the fears that naturally arise when we see the cost of hewing to the Prince of Peace in a world far more accustomed to violence. Pursuing the things that make for peace comes with a cost, and may even involve death. This week we trace the way Jesus' embodying divine peace leads to his betrayal, desertion and death. But hang on—through this week and through our lives. I PROMISE you, the way of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has more life and fulfillment than you or I can imagine. Death and its minions of violence will have no lasting power, for Easter is coming—thanks be to God! Amen.