

March 24, 2024 - Palm Sunday

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you have established your rule in the human heart through the servanthood of Jesus the Christ. By your Spirit, keep us in the joyful procession of those who with their tongues confess Jesus as Lord and with their lives praise him as Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 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. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

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.

Sermon

There is a Canadian comedian named Stewart Reynolds, who's stage name is "Brittlestar." He does commercials; he does stage shows, he does videos on what it is to be Canadian.

He released a video last week, which describes Canadian seasons.

He says (roughly),

Canada has four seasons.

We have summer, which can get pretty warm. It's a great time to spend at the lake or in the ocean.

We have Fall, during which mother nature really puts on a show. The colours are gorgeous, and it's the perfect time to take a walk with a warm, chunky sweater.

We have winter. It's gets really cold, so a lot of Canadians go skiing, or cuddle up next to the fireplace with a mug of hot chocolate.

Then we have Spring. Spring is like winter has a hangover. The streets are covered with piles of snow which haven't melted, they're full of dirt and oil, and the sun never comes out. Spring sounds like a season of hope. We think we're going to see flowers blooming and leaves sprouting on the trees. But no. All we get is grey sky, cold weather, and depression.

Canada has four seasons: Summer, Fall, Winter, and Betrayal!

*So when you come to Canada, be sure to come during the right season. Be **very** sure to come in the right season.*

He's pretty funny.

Now, I'm not saying that there is a direct connecting Brittlestar's "Spring is a betrayal," and Jesus' so-called "Triumphal entry." But I think there may be more of a connection than we might expect.

The way Mark tells the story, Jesus has his disciples get a colt for him. He rides it down the Mount of Olives (which overlooks Jerusalem), across the valley, goes up the other side, goes

through the gate in that part of the wall, and into the nearby Temple (where he has gone before), the small crowd cheering all the way, crying out “Hosanna!” , which means, “Save us!”

Now, this area was occupied by the Roman Empire at the time. Rome was constantly putting on parades. The soldiers would be in their armour, the flags would be flying, in drums would be beating and horns blowing, the dignitaries would be recognized, the power of Rome would be proclaimed, and the people would be encouraged to accept the so-called “peace” that Rome had brought to them by conquering their territory.

You and I all know, from listening to the news these days, that most of the time, most people do not like it when their homeland is occupied! There might be a so-called “peace,” but it comes at a terrible cost, and most people do not want to pay that cost. And the people of Jerusalem in Jesus’ day were no different.

So there might have been some excitement about Jesus coming into town the way he did. It seemed to be the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Zechariah, when he said,

*Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

And another tradition said that, when the Messiah came, he would ride into Jerusalem through the gate that Jesus just went through. Jesus was engaging in some pretty serious “street theatre” here, so I think it’s fair to say that there would have been some expectations about what was going to happen next.

But Jesus didn’t behave as the people expected. Nor did he behave like the Romans would have behaved. And, as we, in this part of the world, are political descendants of the Roman Empire, he doesn’t behave the way *we* expect, either. There were no speeches, no rallying cries, no posters, no bands, or anything else. There was no call to march on the Roman garrison to begin the process of kicking them out. There was not even an announcement of a campaign which would kick the Romans out *eventually*.

He simply went into the Temple, looked around, and then quietly went back to the village on the Mount of Olives, where he had begun his day. Jesus’ “street theatre” was over.

Talk about anti-climax!

Canada, according to Brittlestar, has four seasons: Summer, Fall, Winter and Betrayal.

Jesus, according to Mark, also has four seasons: Teaching, Healing, Parading..., and quietly going home.

But in the face of this disillusionment, I think this story is encouraging us to be honest. I think it’s asking us, allowing us, even *encouraging* us, to *admit* our disappointment. With Jesus! With each other! With the church! With any part of life, and even *all* of life!

We pray for healing, and it doesn’t happen. We pray for peace, but the wars continue. We look for stability, but life keeps bouncing us around. We pray for our churches, and we continue to grow smaller. We follow Jesus on his parade, and end up asking, “Wait. What just happened here? Why isn’t there more? Why did we stop, just when it seemed to be getting good?”

But instead of clinging to our disappointment, perhaps we can take a look, instead, at the expectations we had going into this bit of “street theatre.”

We need to confront the fact that our expectations, about life, about faith, about pretty much everything, are still being influenced by the Roman Empire. We still expect victory. We still expect power. We still expect control. We still expect security. We still expect that our expectations are ok, are normal, are perfectly reasonable.

So, let us take up the invitation to explore our expectations. Let's ask ourselves the hard questions. Let's take a look in the mirror, and see what *we* were bringing to the discussion, to the encounter, to the relationship. Let's confess that we have grown too enamoured of our empires.

And with that confession fresh on our lips, let us begin again to take the difficult journey with the peasant from Galilee, where ever that may go. Amen.

Prayers of the People

A - Trusting the presence of God with all creation, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[Short pause]

A - Holy and merciful One, we confess our admiration for the ways of Empire - the pomp, the prestige, the power. Free us from our attraction to control; free us to follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

A - Holy and merciful One, it is easy to cheer when things are good. Give us quiet patience in the difficult times, that we may follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

A - Holy and merciful One, we admit our disappointment when our expectations are unmet. Help us understand what our expectations mean, and enable us to let them go, that we may follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

A - Holy and merciful One, grant your church conviction and perseverance, that we may love in a loveless world, that we may make peace in a world at war, that may demonstrate justice in a world consumed by brutality. Call us again to you, that we may follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

A - Holy and merciful One, you are most profoundly present with those who are alone, who are invisible, who are expendable. We especially pray for those who hold a place in our hearts.

[Long pause]

Send us out *to* them, that we may discover your presence *with* them, and thereby follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

A - Holy and merciful One, we join the crowds and shout, "Save us." We plead, "Save us." We pray, "Save us." Guide our steps, wherever we go, that we may follow the path of Jesus. In faith we pray,

C - Gracious God, hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.