

“Walk Through Holy Week With Jesus”

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

April 13, 2014

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It is true how much technology has improved the quality of human life. But I personally would be hesitant to one hundred percent trust any technology because of one very bad experience I had. Do you all use GPS's? Well, talking about technology, six summers ago, I was leading 6 vehicles as the head driver. I was working with Sierra Service Project taking 35 youth from three United Methodist Churches to an Indian reservation for a summer mission. I was the only pastor in the whole group. Since I have a terrible sense of direction, without using a map, I trusted my GPS, especially for long distance driving. However, I realized that we all ended up nowhere. After four hours driving, the final destination where we arrived was not an Indian reservation, but a ranch where hundreds of milk cows were grazing near the coast. It was quite an embarrassing experience as the director of the whole group. I am not underestimating benefits of technology, but I am saying that when we follow someone's direction, we should know at least where we are headed. When we work together as a team, it is very important to check whether all team members are on the same page. This point applies to our spiritual journey. When we follow Jesus' footsteps to be like him, we want to know where Jesus is headed and which direction he is pursuing in his life path and ministry.

While I was preparing my message, I pondered over two things in our Scripture readings. First, why did Christ choose to go to Jerusalem for his destination? This was the worst choice because he was going to be killed by other religious leaders. The Bible tells us that Jesus already had told his disciples before the trip to Jerusalem that he would be betrayed, sentenced to death and would be handed over to the Romans for mockery and torture, leading up to the Crucifixion. Secondly, I wondered about the crowd's response. Just as we waved palm branches today in our procession, branches were signs of great welcome in Israel's culture. They welcomed Jesus and shouted out "Hosanna to the son of David!", "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna means "Save us and give us success!" The crowd sincerely welcomed Jesus as their new king and Savior who comes in the name of the Lord. But they were not on the same page as Jesus. There's a Korean adage "Two dreams in one bed". It means a relationship of two people whose lives are intimately intertwined, but who do not fundamentally communicate with each other. This expression perfectly describes how different expectations the crowd had for the

entry of Jesus to Jerusalem. This morning, I hope we learn some insights from Jesus' dream and the way that he chose so that we understand him.

Let's revisit the crowd first in the New Testament reading. We sense how excited and jubilant the crowd was when they welcomed Jesus as their new Messiah and King. Their goal is liberation from their bondage. The Israeli people were seeking a Messiah who would free Israel politically from the Roman Empire and bring them economic success. In order to be their Messiah, Jesus should meet their expectations. They wanted a Messiah like King David who brought them prosperity, security and independence through his powerful leadership. The crowd identified Jesus as King David. The crowd projected their eagerness and longings to Jesus. As long as he showed this visible power, he might be respected as the Messiah. It was a conditional welcoming. It is a part of our human nature. They welcomed Jesus for the condition of satisfying their desires and fulfilling their wishes. Let us be honest before God. Who are we? We have to acknowledge that we are all conditional in a sense. We like to receive more than give away. Our actions, thoughts and even making relationships are often self-centered ones.

Last Thursday evening, we had soup supper and spiritual gathering. We hung our prayers on our prayer tree. The theme of our prayer was about love. I deeply appreciate Kathy's great leadership and volunteer help and contributions to make our soup supper not only possible but also meaningful. The last six weeks, we have focused on prayer practice with various themes, like forgiveness and acceptance. Last Thursday, we were asked to think about differences of God's love and our love. What will be your answer between what you love and what God loves? That question kept me exploring words and answers. When we say, "I love this or that" it presumes that it brings me satisfaction and happiness. But when we say, "God loves me and you", it means acceptance, encouragement, connecting our broken relationship. God treats us not as an object for satisfaction but as a subject to make a meaningful partner to interact with each other. That's what God does for love.

Jesus entered Jerusalem to give away his life. Only unconditional love can change our lives and transform us. Just think about Jerusalem. What does it mean 'Jerusalem' as a metaphor at Jesus' time? Jerusalem was the center of Israel where religious leaders dominated the whole society. Gentiles were not considered as brothers and sisters. Moses' law was the final standard to receive God's message. There was no concept of God's unconditional love. The idea of God's love for all people made religious leaders feel upset. Jerusalem is a metaphor of our society where legalism and racism, sexism and discrimination are still working. Jesus was determined to go and declare the love of God for the

people. Regardless of who you are, the love of God is available and free to you. In Jesus Christ, the love of God is declared and revealed to all people.

Today, Jesus entered Jerusalem to be our Messiah, too, not as a warrior, but by bringing the Spirit of God's unconditional acceptance and love. I believe that Jesus wants to come to our Fair Oaks church, this society and this world to be our Messiah. This is the way and direction we should be headed and follow. Let us welcome Jesus and follow him as our way. Amen.