



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

APRIL 9, 2017

PALM SUNDAY

LISTENING ALONGSIDE: ECHOING CHRIST

Listen to the Wind

Psalm 51:6-12; Matthew 21:1-11

If I were to make a movie of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, I would film on a day just like today: clear blue skies with a few puffy, white clouds, a cool, crisp morning warming into a pleasant afternoon, and the re-awakening of the earth in full display at every turn. It would be the kind of day that makes you feel glad to be alive, one that puts an extra spring into your step and gladness in your heart.

On a day like this one, you easily sense excitement in the air so, when you see friends streaming toward the main road, you hurry up to find out what is going on. When you hear that Jesus is just up ahead, riding on a donkey toward Jerusalem, your heart quickens, your excitement grows because you remember studying a passage in synagogue that speaks of a king riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey and you think this must surely be the Messiah! Like others around you, you break off a low hanging branch from a tree by the road and begin waving it as you chant with the crowd, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Matthew 21:9).

As the crowd approaches the gate to the city, but well before they enter, I would have a wind kick up, the kind of warm spring breeze that is strong enough to ruffle your hair but not knock the hat off your head. It would be the kind of wind that gets your attention and causes you to look upward and behind you to see if storm clouds are gathering, but they are not. The wind plays through the crowd, weaving in and out, back and forth, growing stronger as the gate gets nearer. Just before Jesus rides into the city, the wind gives a final push, making it difficult to hold the branches aloft and almost pushing Jesus into Jerusalem. Then it dies away and all is still as the makeshift parade is swallowed up in the crowded streets of Jerusalem.

Obviously Matthew does not mention wind in the story, nor do Mark and Luke. Yet wind is an important actor throughout scripture. In the Hebrew language, the word for wind also means breath and spirit. When creating the world, we are told that God spoke, breathed, and life emerged. John connects that act with Jesus, the Living Word of God (John1) and Jesus

himself tells Nicodemus that the Spirit of God is like the wind which, though we cannot see it, makes its effects felt and seen and heard (John 3). In that dramatic and unforgettable scene recorded in Acts, the Spirit of God sweeps over the new believers like a wind of fire and they are given renewed hope and power. When the Spirit of God moves, it is like a wind bringing change and reminding us that everything is not always as it appears.

In the movie *Chocolat*, set in a small French town in 1959, it is the wind that brings a woman and her daughter to town during Lent. Despite the observance of strict abstinence from all pleasures during the holy season, the woman sets up a chocolaterie and, through her culinary delights and kindness, teaches the village about love and openness and intolerance of abuse and discrimination. At one point the wind blows open the doors of the church, but the leader of the community, an unhappy and strict man, forces them closed again, an obvious symbol of our unwillingness to allow the Spirit access to our innermost lives.

Wind is a symbol of the Spirit of God at work, so I would have the wind blow over the crowd accompanying Jesus into Jerusalem because the Spirit is trying to get them to understand that things are not what they seem to be. The crowd remembers the Old Testament prophecy of a king entering Jerusalem as Jesus did, but they get their facts mixed up. They cheer, "Hosanna to the Son of David!", voicing their belief that God will send a military leader like King David to be their Messiah. The prophet Zechariah spoke, however, of God himself entering the Holy City. The king who is to save his people is not a clone of the much admired warrior-king. The One who will redeem his people is none other than God himself. It is no wonder that instead of a revolt, the crowd dispersed. Jesus did not come to take the world by force but through the self-giving love of God.

We would do well to listen to the wind, to the Spirit of God, as we enter this Holy Week and relive the life and death of Jesus. Listen to what is going on and what happens when Jesus is around. Listen beyond words and look beyond events to hear and see where God is at work beyond where we are headed. It is the Spirit which helps us to realize that the tomb is not the end of the story but that out of death comes new life for all.

This morning, our choir and musicians offer us James Whitbourn's beautiful, moving, and insightful work, *Son of God Mass*. A vital part of this music is the soprano saxophone. You will notice that it sounds very much like wind weaving in and out of the music, swirling around our hearts and minds,

a reminder of the Spirit at work in and around us—even on a day like this one. As we worship and through out this week, listen to the wind that our lives might better echo Christ to the world. Amen.

April 9, 2017

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Our spirits leap across time and space to join the happy voices of the people who lauded and praised you, O Christ. Our hearts swell with the same excitement as we realize that we are in the presence of God and God is marching with us.

All praise and glory be to you, O God, for choosing to love us and for choosing us to love you. Hosanna in the highest for you have come again to free us from our sin and small mindedness and to open for us the gates of righteousness.

In our exuberance and delight, remind us that from time to time we need to quiet our voices and listen to what the Spirit is doing around and within us. We need to pay attention to what is happening in our midst and run to catch up with what the Spirit is doing in your name.

Open our ears, O God, to hear your Spirit speak. Open our eyes to see your compassion at work. Open our minds to realize new possibilities for ministry. Open our hearts to the whispers of other souls. Open our hands to be generous in all that we do.

Swirl around us, O God, and do a new thing with us. Breathe into us the courage and resilience to do what is right. Blow your healing breath upon our world and bring peace and wholeness to your children. Breathe on us and empower us to bring your kingdom into the light.

Praise be to you, O God, for coming in the person of Jesus to show us a new way, a new heart, a new energy for grace. Hosanna in the highest for Christ our Lord speaks to us all. Amen.