

## **Sermon for April 14, 2019**

### **A Dose of Hope**

#### **Luke 19:28-40**

#### **The Reverend Roger Pancost**

Last Sunday, before the service of worship began, I was talking to an individual who expressed his dismay over the problems facing the world. Specifically, he is saddened by the fact that people continue to commit acts of violence against one another. I could tell from this individual's voice that he was feeling a sense of hopelessness.

Later that same day I heard that same hopelessness being expressed in a conversation with members of our church's Youth Group. Some of the young people shared their distress over the continued destruction of the environment. Some spoke of harassment from other students. Others said that they are concerned about school shootings, knowing that such violence can take place anywhere.

Like the individuals that I spoke with before worship, and the teenagers in our Youth Group, I also find myself feeling hopeless at times. Perhaps this is true for you as well. Any time we look at a news feed, read a newspaper, or turn on the evening news, we are reminded of the many problems facing our world. We hear of people fighting over land, politics and religion. We see images of children, and other migrants, fleeing their homelands. We are dismayed that millions of people lack proper nutrition, safe water, and medical care. Scientists inform us that glaciers are melting at alarming rates and species of animals are becoming extinct. Natural disasters, such as floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes destroy property and take lives.

Added to the problems facing the greater world, are the issues we each face in our personal lives. Some individuals are having difficulties with relationships. Some are dealing with problems in their places of employment or in their schools. Some are saddened by the death of a loved-one, or another form of loss. Others are faced with a medical concern. It is easy to get discouraged. It is easy to lose hope.

As we journey back in time to the day in which Jesus rode a donkey into the city of Jerusalem, we are reminded that the people who lined the road had similar concerns. Like us, they were faced with issues of health, relationships, and loss.

They also lived under the oppression of the Roman Empire. The Empire imposed high taxes and threatened physical harm to anyone who questioned its authority.

Biblical scholar, R. Alan Culpepper offers this poignant description of the crowd that gathered to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem,

“The cloaks thrown on the road that day were not expensive garments but tattered shawls and dusty, sweat-stained rags. Jesus was the king of the oppressed and the suffering. He shared their hardships, relieved their suffering, accepted them when others deemed them unacceptable, gave them hope, and embodied God’s love for them.” (The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume IX)

Defying the hardships that they were faced with, and, defying the oppression of the Roman Empire, these individuals sang their welcome to Jesus, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!”

They did this because in the midst of all their difficulties, Jesus gave them hope. The hope that Jesus gave the people was not found in earthly power or dominance over others. Jesus was not a warrior king who was going to overthrow the Roman Empire. Jesus’ power was found in serving others: healing the sick; welcoming the outcast; challenging the rich and powerful; and feeding the hungry. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s steadfast love.

In the same way that the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem needed hope, we need hope. When we lose hope all kinds of bad things can happen. Some people isolate themselves from others. Some people do self-harm. Some people act out in negative, and even violent, ways. Others throw their arms up in despair and say that there is nothing they can do.

The hope that Jesus gives is not passive. It is an invitation to join Jesus in sharing God’s steadfast love with the world. Even though some of the same people, who welcomed Jesus on Sunday, turned against him on Friday, many of them went on to continue his ministry of compassion.

Our hope is found in the promise that God is with us and that God empowers us to do the same acts of love as Jesus. Through our compassion we can help to bring healing to those who are hurting, we can feed those who are hungry, we can support those who are being treated unjustly, we can embrace the outcast, and we can work to protect the environment.

No, our hope is not a passive hope. It does not involve sitting back and expecting things to get better. It is an active hope. A hope that inspires us to do

something. A hope that gives us the courage to use our voices. A hope that demonstrates that love is the most powerful force on this planet. Even when Jesus was faced with adversity, and certain death, he did not stop demonstrating God's love for the world. With great courage and conviction he made his way to the city of Jerusalem.

According to the story some of the religious leaders wanted Jesus to silence the crowd. We can't be certain of their reason for asking Jesus to do this. They may think the moment is too political and the empire will retaliate. They may disagree with the inference that Jesus is the Messiah. They may be jealous of the attention that an itinerant preacher from Nazareth is getting. Jesus responds to their request for silence by saying, "I tell you, if they keep quiet the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:40) Jesus is proclaiming, "You can't keep the power of God's love silent."

Palm Sunday comes to us each year as a dose of hope. It is a day to not only remember the importance of holding onto hope, it is a day to celebrate hope. We celebrate the hope that Jesus brought to a rag-tag group of individuals on the outskirts of Jerusalem. We celebrate the hope that has empowered followers of Jesus to share God's love with the world. We celebrate the hope that comes to us anew this day. And so, as we wave our palms let us sing with gusto...

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!"