**Revelations in This Time**

(Message delivered by Rev. Dr. David McAllister, on April 5, 2020.  Posted on April 6, 2020.)

Luke 19:28-40

            Okay, close your eyes (just don’t go to sleep) and picture it.  Jesus is coming into Jerusalem with the crowds of people surrounding Him, cheering Him, and laying palm branches, and even their coats, in the path before Him.  Now, picture what it would look like, as someone standing on the roof of the building just up ahead, started yelling, “Stop, stop.  You need to have at least six feet between you.”  Yeah, the chaos you can picture, would surely have happened.

            But, luckily for those surrounding Jesus, there were no such restrictions in place, and, they were doing so at a time when the occupying Romans had no interest in religious people.  There would have been no concern that Jesus might conflict with the theological viewpoints of the Jewish leaders.  Yet, because their main task was to preserve peace, they probably kept a keen eye on this procession, for a crowd gathered anywhere could spell trouble.

            But then, if the Romans understood Aramaic or Hebrew, they would have been even more troubled, for the people shouted, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!  Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”  This was a treasonous statement.  Rome had a king, Caesar, and his kingdom extended all the way down to Jerusalem and beyond.  You can’t have two kings, at least not without a fight.

            So, while we wouldn’t on this Sunday risk being in a crowd, unless somehow we were all stationed six feet apart, which wouldn’t feel much like a crowd, these people were taking a risk, a big risk, proclaiming Jesus to be king.  Now, you have been through this story before, and likely remember that Jesus did not come mounted on a horse, ready for battle, but on the colt of a donkey, which was a symbol of his coming in peace.  Jesus was clear about who he was and what he was doing.  But the people were caught up in the moment, they wanted a military king, and they shouted that this new leader had arrived.  And in that, in being there, there was great risk.

            So how today, as we sit safely in our homes hearing this, at home because we are ordered to stay home for our own safety, how do we respond to his entrance?

            We are of course, first of all, responding through our gathering for worship, through telling the story, through singing the songs of celebration and joy.  It is a unique celebration to be sure, but it is a celebration nonetheless.

            But there is more.  As I was watching a webinar (an online education event for those not familiar with the term  -  a seminar, but online), the president of the seminary I attended spoke about the word Apocalypse.  Now, when we talk about apocalyptic events, we usually think about the end of the world.  We think about something catastrophic happening.  And when this virus first began to circulate, people questioned whether this was going to be such an event.

            But if you look at the final book in the Bible, you will find three ways in which the title has been translated  -  The Apocalypse of John, The Book of Revelation, The Revelation to John.  When I grew up, I mostly heard it referred to as the Apocalypse, because so much of the imagery of the book speaks of the end times.

            But let’s turn our focus in a different direction.  Let’s go with what is now the more common titling of the book, which is the “Revelation to John,” or sometimes just “Revelation.”  And what is a revelation?  It is a revealing of some truth.  It is insights into some situation or circumstance in our lives.  And indeed, it can be a word from God.

            When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he was the revelation, there on the colt, before them.  He was indeed the one coming in the name of the Lord.  But the message he brought was different than the message they were expecting.  They expected a military intervention, an ushering in of God’s kingdom of power and might.

            But Jesus came as a king of Peace, riding on that colt.  Jesus came to continue to proclaim the kingdom of God, but for Jesus that was a kingdom not defined by military might, but by love, and kindness, and caring, and hospitality, and sharing, and welcoming one another.  Jesus came to ask us to share bread with one another, to support the widow, to care for the orphan, to welcome people into our lives that others had turned away.  Yes, Jesus came as King, but in a far different way than expected.

            So, on this Palm Sunday, how does Jesus ride into our midst?  What is he revealing to us?  What is the Revelation here?

            He certainly comes to us at a time of uncertainty and vulnerability.  We know that April 30th is the current end of the Stay-at-Home order.  We know that there are hopes to end it sooner.  We know that some expect it to be extended.  In effect, you and I just don’t know.  And we are staying home, staying at a distance that feels strange, because we are indeed vulnerable to a virus that we cannot see.

            And so, as we celebrate Jesus’ entrance once again into our lives on this Palm Sunday, how does he speak into that uncertainty and vulnerability?  First off, he lets us recognize that God is in charge.  The God of Creation, the God of Hope and Peace, is in charge.  At the end of our scripture reading, when some of the Pharisees urge Jesus to quiet the crowd, Jesus tells them that, “if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”  Stones speaking, shouting, could only happen through the power of the God of Creation.  God would do it if need be.  God is present in all of this.  God is present.  God is present with us as well.

            Secondly, Jesus takes this opportunity, as we gather in the midst of this crisis, to once again reveal to us the core of his message.  He asks us to love one another, and to care for one another.  And you are certainly doing that.  Through your prayers, your phone calls to one another, your sending of cards, your offers of doing shopping for others, your actual shopping for others, you are indeed hearing him and showing that love as you care for one another.

            When Jesus talks about caring for those who cannot return the favor, people like widows and orphans, people like many of the homeless today, people affected by job losses and even illness, he means that to be another core part of the kingdom he is bringing to life.  And I want to tell you, as you probably read in the newsletter, we have done that as a church family.  We had collected $1,125 for Week of Compassion, and we sent that on to them at this time when they are ready to respond to this Coronavirus pandemic.  We won’t know specifically who is helped through those gifts, but people will be cared for in needed ways.  And closer to home, the Westside Food Bank is being careful in their handling of food, and so while we needed to delay taking our food donations to them, we sent a check for $180 with which they can purchase much-needed food for people in our community.  Reaching out to those who are in need.  Speaking Jesus’ message through our actions.

The third element that I believe Jesus was revealing to those yelling Hosanna and laying down palms before him, and is revealing to us at this time, is that life changes, and for us, our ministry can have a much broader reach than it has in the past.  The very fact that we are worshipping in this way, rather than just shutting down the church, is a vision of what we might do when this crisis passes.  We will look at ways of putting together the resource for people to watch us as we worship, to feel a part of our church family, whether they are at a distance, or homebound, or just ill on a particular Sunday.

            It is easy to become comfortable doing what we do, but there is often so much more that can happen.  And Jesus speaks into this, and says “Yes, you can do more, in my name.”

            Jesus comes to us today in celebration.  Jesus comes to us to refresh our hearts and renew our ministry.  He is here.  Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.