

Sermon for Palm/Passion Sunday, April 9, 2017 - "Intent on Love"

Palm Sunday, Sunday of the Passion
April 9, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Intent on Love

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Jesus moved through our world very differently than we do. Often, we go through our days focused on making progress, advancing our cause, moving forward. We want to improve ourselves, our families, our communities, our world.

Some of those same impulses inspired people to march with Jesus into Jerusalem waving palm branches and chanting, Hosanna! They had long been oppressed by Rome and other powers. They saw Jesus as the one who would move them up in the world, who would advance the cause of the Kingdom of Israel.

Similar dynamics drive our politics today. Some wonder if a hard-driving business man can produce results. Others march, protest and organize hoping for different outcomes. We vote and work to make things better and sometimes despair that they never will be.

We all long for things to look up - even as we define "up" differently. We want God to move in our world to make things better.

We are so often disappointed. And we're in good company. Those crowds that marched into Jerusalem with Jesus must have been so frustrated and angry with him just a few days later. They were swept up in all the excitement, all the hopes of forward movement, positive change.

But then, when it was time for Jesus to have a showdown with the powers that be, he was silent. Jesus was silent and Rome killed him. Jesus didn't speak truth to power. He didn't actively resist the powers that be. He didn't make things better. He was silent. And he died.

Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

It seems progress was not Jesus' intention. Instead, love was his intention. Jesus embodied God's subversive, life-giving love:

Love that refuses to get into a power struggle with evil;
Love that will not force its own agenda;
Love that endures whether we're raising our voices hopefully or ready to crucify someone;
Love that persists in loving even when it leads to death.

This love opens another way for us, the way of dying and letting go so that new life might prevail - letting go of our agendas, our pride and our despair and opening to God's life-giving presence, God's presence that is with us and our enemies.

This love helps us focus not on moving up or advancing a cause but on daily and yearly cycles of dying to ourselves and rising to new life in Christ, of letting go and opening to love.

It allows us to move differently in the world - to engage ourselves, our communities, and even our politics with love, seeking the change that only love can bring.

So this Holy Week, we again walk with Jesus to the cross so that we might die and rise again to walk in love.

Let's take a moment of silent prayer.