

“Do You Hear the People (or Rocks) Sing?”

March 28, 2021

The Grace of Les Misérables series – Palm Sunday

In-person & Livestream

GRACE - that free gift of God - unconditional love that we don't earn or deserve, but that we receive. We've explored grace through Jesus' life and ministry and as a guiding force in the story of *Les Misérables* and Jean Valjean and all those his life touches. As we begin a journey through this Holy Week, grace takes center stage as Jesus makes his way to the cross.

Too often, we sanitize the Gospel story to make Palm Sunday into a simple parade - welcome and excitement. But when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the city was a powder keg waiting to ignite. It was Passover, so the city was filled with people - maybe as many as 200,000 people who were there to celebrate Passover. The parade was really a political rally - a protest against the established politics and religious system.

Yes, Jesus came into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna!” (literally “Save us now!”) with branches spread out and coats on the ground. But the underlying hope (and even demand) of the crowd was that Jesus would save them from Roman oppression. *Make it stop! Set us free. Do it now.* You can be King if you follow through.

For Jews in the first century, waiting for the Messiah was their reality - waiting for the Anointed One, sent from God, who would rule and change the world. But Jesus wasn't that king. Even his choice of animal sends a clear message. He wants a colt.

In the Old Testament book of Zechariah, a prophet, there's a word concerning the world's one true king and how he would make himself known. **SHOW SLIDE:** *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

He's the One they've waited for, but not the one they expect. A small colt is way different than a powerful war horse! A colt versus a horse. You can ask my son who rode a donkey on our horseback riding excursion in Arizona while the rest of us rode horses.

The story of *Les Mis* shows the mixture of confusion, economic disparity, and inequality mounting to make Paris one spark away from violence. The rights won during the French Revolution were not easily maintained in the midst of political upheaval. More and more people were against the French monarchy - and seeking freedom from oppression and poverty.

Our current cultural and political and climate bears some resemblance, which is true with many moments. It's important to remember that Jesus' ministry hasn't made him many friends in high places up to this point. We forget that. We hear shouts of

“Hosanna!” and think of the welcome, but they welcomed them because they thought he would do what they wanted.

Jesus doesn't have friends in high places. He has disciples close to him who are struggling to understand his talk of sacrifice and many people who have come to him seeking healing and hope, and those people have mostly been people who are on the outside. He has brought them back and restored them to community. That has only served to heighten the tension between Jesus and those in power. Even so, Jesus doesn't call for violence even though he knows that others are plotting his death.

Jesus spoke out against the Pharisees, overturned the money-changing tables because of their oppressive practices, and preached at the Temple, but there was no violence. It's truly another miracle that we don't talk about. This moment that we celebrate on Palm Sunday could've been a bloodbath if Jesus would've responded differently - like the people expected he would.

The same cannot be said for the revolutionaries who built the barricades in *Les Misérables*. We're going to play the clip from *Les Mis* where the people are gathered for a funeral procession for their leader, but ready to rise up against those in power - stating their case for people who are struggling in poverty. For those of you who are watching the livestream, there will be a break in the action because we're not able to show copyrighted material on our livestream. The link was sent out in Friday's note, and I'll send it out again later. It's about 2 minutes, so stay tuned!

SHOW MEDIA – *Do You Hear the People Sing?*

SHOW SLIDE: *Do you hear the people sing? Singing the songs of angry men? It is the music of the people who will not be slaves again! When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums, there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes!*

Those same words could be used for the people in Jerusalem. The revolution is fueled by a desire for justice, but the reliance on violence to get there doesn't work. They chose to take up arms, and their revolution was quickly and violently squashed.

As we journey through this week, we'll encounter Jesus' trial before Pilate. When Pilate gave the crowd a choice between Jesus or Barabbas, Pilate was all too quick to release Barabbas, an insurrectionist who had fought against Rome. Rome was powerful, and perhaps Pilate knew that Rome would win every time against the likes of Barabbas.

Jesus was another story. His approach and power were different. Releasing one who gave the poor a voice, healed the sick, and raised people from the dead was a problem. Jesus had to be stopped at all costs.

Pastor Matt Rawle says, “Every revolution needs three ingredients: a problem, a solution, and a leader.” We can focus on what was happening in Jerusalem when Jesus

rode in on a donkey or on the after-effects of the French Revolution, but we're challenged to allow those moments to inform our reality. Certainly, there are problems, solutions, and leaders at work. Calls for change are always with us because of our human struggles for equality, equity, and justice. They are age-old, and yet still with us.

The season of Lent is meant to be a time of honest confession, repentance, and transformation. In our own lives, there is need for change. Does anyone have something they need to work on? The same is true in our community. People shouldn't be hungry or without clothing or shelter, and yet we know that's a reality. Share story of man getting help from MAP

No one should live in fear because of racism and violence, but many do. Children and young people should be protected from abuse (everyone should be!), and every day we hear stories that are hard to fathom. And the list goes on. Naming the problems is important, but isn't enough. We need to work together on solutions, and we need to trust each other to seek the common good. We have work to do.

To put Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with the crowd's shouting "Hosanna! (Save us now!)" up against examples of standing up against power offers some insight into how we engage our world. Certainly, it's been a season of seeing acts of protest - some of them peaceful, some of them turning violent. We have to hear the truth of the problems. For those who speak truth to power and seek justice, righteous anger is a real thing.

During this past year, I've participated in some of the gatherings focused on social justice - more specifically on anti-racism - in our community. The emotions are palpable as I listen to shouts for change. Praying for change is important, but it's not enough. Action that comes as a result of prayer is God's way of working in the world. This moment in Jesus' life calls us to consider what it means to seek justice, stand up for what we believe in light of our faith in Jesus, and follow him even into difficult places. It is a moment when we face the reality that following him is sometimes the hardest road because it means speaking truth to power, risking conflict, having hard conversations, and going the way of love (not the mushy love, but love that requires accountability and authenticity).

Jesus doesn't lead a violent revolution, and his call is for us to follow in that same way. That doesn't mean we remain silent or ignore the abuse of power. We continue to cry out for Jesus to save, though we know the ending. We continue to call out "Hosanna!" knowing that the One we follow calls us to act - resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. Those words ring in my ears. And in case we're wondering, there's plenty to resist.

When we witness the sin of racism, we speak up - and that goes for any other "ism" too. When we read about attempts to suppress the right of everyone to participate in free and fair elections exercising the right to vote, we advocate in whatever way we can. We fight for the equal rights for everyone - no matter what. We care about protecting people from violence and offering help and hope to those who struggle. We seek to do what is right as we find our footing in loving God and loving others - seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Eventually Jesus gets down off the colt. He makes his way to the cross. It's not the expected ending for those who hailed him as King a few days earlier. It's not what they wanted. It's not what they asked for. It's not what they demanded. If Jesus had simply resisted, Jesus would have been king of Israel and died a powerful man.

But Jesus went to the cross. If he had simply accepted the cross, his loved ones could visit his grave with great adoration. But Jesus upended expectations again - transforming an instrument of death into a means of eternal life and hope.

Jesus didn't fulfill the expectations of those who greeted him on that day in Jerusalem. His saving work wasn't what they planned because he saved by showing agape love - and going all the way to the cross to offer salvation to the world. He led a revolution, to be sure, but it was fueled by love that overcomes evil - and seeks to transform the world by love, with love, through love, in love.

In your Lenten bags, there's a photo card that speaks to this reality as we enter Holy Week and remember that this parade and protest was truly a defining moment.

SHOW SLIDE: REVOLUTION photo card

It continues to remind us that we follow the One who comes in humility to bring justice and peace - by loving completely and extending grace as far as it can possibly go.

May we truly journey through this week - intentionally - reading, praying, seeking, and knowing that we can't skip from "Hosanna!" to "Hallelujah!" sitting on either side of Holy Week. We must go through it to embrace the fullness of God's grace and the hope God offers in Christ.

May it be so. Thanks be to God! AMEN.