

“As One Who Serves”
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018
1 Corinthians 11:17-34;
Luke 19:28-44; Luke 22:14-27

Today is Palm Sunday. We do come in celebration remembering how Jesus entered in to Jerusalem that day. There was this commotion, this gathering, this march together, this joy at his coming. We think of it as a triumphal entry.

So everybody gathered and was yelling for him. At that moment, the Pharisees come along and say to Jesus, “Tell these people to be quiet.” Jesus says, “No, even if they are quiet, the rocks themselves will sing out.” There was something important about that moment. Perhaps it was a moment in which people noticed him in a new way. He was noticed as coming in. I love one of the other passages where you hear that all Jerusalem was troubled because of his coming in. Something was changing. Something was happening, and in this moment there was a gathering that led people to see that.

We do that. We have gatherings that help us see things. Yesterday here in town we had the March for our Lives. We had youth who were marching to bring out an issue—that they shouldn’t have to go to school and be in fear. In that march they are raising an issue that we have to struggle with, we have to think about. Why is there gun violence in our country? What is it about? Where is it coming from and why? It raised the issue. We have had other marches that raise issues that are important and we need to struggle with and work on.

Back in Jerusalem, not everybody was happy about it. Jesus coming in was raising an issue. It’s interesting, as he comes in there is this great celebration, a great commotion. The crowd is shouting hosanna—pray, Lord, save us—that’s what hosannas are about. So they are thinking about salvation coming, his coming to them. And in a very short set of verses you go from Jesus coming in with all this celebration, and all of a sudden you see him cry. There’s this great contrast between this moment of celebration and Jesus crying. What is he crying about? He is shedding a tear and he says, “Jerusalem, you don’t know what makes for peace. You are missing the visitation of your God.”

Sometimes as we think about these things, it feels like just an abstract thing where we might miss the visitation of God, we don’t know what makes for peace. He’s talking into a concrete situation. What he’s noticing is that they are not going to listen to him, and in not listening to him, real events are going to take place. In about 30-35 years or so, they are going to be in a war with Rome, the first of these rebellions. Not only are they in a war with Rome, but they have this infighting. At one point there is a siege around Jerusalem and because there is a disagreement between groups, one of the groups destroys all the food. They make it harder on themselves. When he says, “You don’t know what makes for peace,” he’s not just talking into the wind. He’s talking about the real lives of real people.

They will have another war 20 or 30 years later and then another big one about 70 years later. And what happens? Do they get Judea free? No, they lose a lot of lives and create a dispersion. He's suggesting they don't know what makes for peace.

One of the reasons I think he is suggesting they don't know what makes for peace is what he says about them missing the visitation of their God. They miss what he is saying. How easy it is to think of him standing on the edge of the crowd shouting into our lives as we go busily about them, paying only minor attention to what he's saying. In their case, perhaps they are paying enough attention that they actually don't like what he says.

But it's not just the Jewish folks of Jesus' time that struggle with what makes for peace. The apostles, shortly after having a communion meal—after Jesus bringing them together and showing them that they are a family of faith, that they are children of God, that they get to come and be fed by God—are now talking about who is greatest, sowing the seeds of division among themselves.

Sometimes we look back and say, "Oh, if we could just be like the New Testament church!" Well, Paul has something to say about that. He wasn't too happy with the way the Corinthians were being a New Testament church. They were creating factions and divisions over the very meal that was to bring them together. Some were coming early because they had the means to do so, and eating before everybody else got there. Some may have been rushing in a little later to see how much wine they could imbibe before it was over. The sense is that the people who were working hard and couldn't get away, the poor among them, were coming last and finding there was very little left for them and they had to deal with these tipsy folks that were already there. Paul says, "Why are you humiliating the poor?"

You see, it's not just the Jews of the first century. It's not just the disciples. It's not just the New Testament church. There is some way in which this feels like a human condition that we struggle with around who's the greatest and how do I get my own. Can I make sure I get myself taken care of? If I see things differently than somebody else, if I think that gun violence is something we shouldn't talk about or if I think it is, is that going to be a division that keeps us apart?

He invites us to come to the same table, and yet, in the Corinthians passage, it has become one of grief instead of goodness. It's one of struggle. It's one of division rather than of unity. My sense is that what Jesus is saying when he cries over Jerusalem is that if they would only listen he could have shown them what makes for peace. What it suggests to me is that if we want to know what makes for peace, perhaps it is falling in behind Jesus. He can form us into what makes for peace.

But again, that's not just an abstract. It's not just a nice way of saying things. Jesus is going to give us some direct instructions. He says he wants to make a new covenant—a new covenant around a table that suggests that the table is for everyone

and that we are all children of God. That's what Paul gets so upset about. The Corinthians are turning what was meant for community into individualism, using it for themselves and not for the community, not for the unity of faith, not doing what makes for peace. So Jesus' new covenant is one that wants to bring us together, not divide us. Not create factions, but create a family of faith that will enable us to be the Body of Christ.

He goes on and addresses exactly what so often feels like the problem—the human dilemma that I want to be right; I want to be greatest; I want it all for myself; I want the world to work the way that I want it to work. I want. I want. He suggests something different. He says, “The leaders among you lord it over the people. They want to be called benefactor because somehow they are giving you the crumbs.” He says, “That's not the way it is to be with you. I came to serve.”

You know, if you go out to eat, the focus is on the people at the table, and the server is taken for granted. He says, “I'm that server. I have come to serve.” My wife and I had a person in our lives who was a great example of this. One way she would try to help us out would be to say, “I would really like to take your children for the night. I would really appreciate you being able to allow me to do that,” because she knew it was serving us, giving us a break, and making it sound like we were doing her a favor by letting her help us.

What if the world were like that, where we were serving one another? Where we were asking what we could do to make each other's lives better? Our children are asking us what to do to make our world a safer place for them in school and on the streets. What can we do to make this world a better place? How do we serve each other and all God's children?

Jesus said, “I came as one who serves,” and he acts it out in John 13 where he washes their feet. He invites us to follow him and to be those who serve. Amen.