

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon
Date: 5 April 2020 Drive-In Palm Sunday
Lesson: Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 21:1-11

Perhaps you have seen this stated online by friends and acquaintances, who have shared this common refrain, “This is the loneliest Lent that I have ever Lented.” It is a reflection of how much life has changed in a short period of time. I was playing with my family the other evening in the girls’ playroom, and I noticed a latex balloon that was being batted about.

“Wait... we’ve had the balloon for a while now. When did we get that?”

“It came from the Shrove Tuesday celebration,” responded Pastor Ginger.

“It is a Shrove Tuesday miracle that this latex balloon has survived so long.”

This exchange had me think back to how we kicked off Lent this year. This particular season of Lent has been the longest decade of our lives, so it seems. Back then, none of us thought that we’d begin Holy Week like this.

The population of our congregation comes from a variety of places and backgrounds. Holy Week has been celebrated in different ways in our lifetimes, but none of them have been like this. My experience, and perhaps yours, is that Holy Week’s unique liturgies, songs, and prayers have shepherded me into a deeper experience. A time of contemplation; a time to enter the story. Worship planners, like your pastors and Music Director, spend months planning Holy Week. We lean on traditions and experiences that will make this week work. Then suddenly those plans are... null.

For many Christians, the prospect of not having these liturgies, songs, and prayers seems alienating, as though Holy Week cannot happen without them. Even if there is a remnant of those plans that remain, does holding a palm frond behind a windshield carry

with it the same experience of processing into the sanctuary lifting the fronds high? And that is just one difference found in day-one of Holy Week.

It is okay to express our emotions to God about this loss of our traditions, whether they are liturgical in nature or social in nature. It is definitely okay to express our fear or frustrations to God about everything this world is going through right now. But here is the good news about Holy Week this year: although there is a loss of traditions, rituals, liturgies, and songs, Holy Week will still happen. God will see to it.

This year is a reminder, at least to me, that even though my planning and the church's rituals all are faithful ways to deepen the experience of Holy Week, they are not the only way that God can work to make Holy Week holy. God is God, you and I are not, and it is ultimately God who makes this week holy. It's different from our usual Holy Week, but God can still draw us together as a community, even if it is not around the altar on Maundy Thursday. It's different from our usual Holy Week, but God can still allow us to glimpse the gravity of Christ's passion this Good Friday, even if it doesn't take place in a darkened sanctuary. God still seeks to speak to us this week. God still seeks to have its holiness to permeate our lives.

One aspect of the Palm Sunday narrative has stood out to me in the past as simply odd, but this year I see it as good news for us. When Jesus gives his instructions to his two disciples, he says, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." The odd thing is that this actually works. A couple of disciples are untying a donkey and colt, and the owner of the animals approaches and says, "Hey, what are you doing with my donkey and colt?" And the two disciples respond in confidence, "The Lord needs them," then they continue untying the animals. And the owner, seeing their confidence, replies, "Oh... okay... sorry for the interruption. Carry on then."

Doesn't this story affirm the idea that if you act as if you know what you are doing, most other people will let you carry on? I can't help but think these disciples were surprised that they pulled this off. Then again, Jesus said it would work. Truth be told, none of us has ever thought we'd experience a Holy Week while physically distancing ourselves from one another, but here we go. Like those two disciples, we are going to confidently act as if God is going to do something in this most unlikely of Holy Weeks, and we just might be surprised at what God can pull off. Holy Week does not require a lot of the rituals that we associate with it, it only requires God to act. God is good and God is loving. God has guided the church and the world through difficult circumstances in the past, and God will do so again this time.

The apostle Paul tells us today, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Today we are of the same mind of Jesus when we physically separate ourselves and avoid physical interactions as much as possible for the time being, because doing so promotes life and uplifts the sanctity of life.

We patiently acknowledge that this Holy Week must be different. We will gather together some other day, we will break bread together some other day, we will greet each other physically some other day. It is okay -- and necessary -- to put those things off for a future day. Doing so is how we can be of the same mind of Christ Jesus in this moment. It is okay for this Holy Week to be different, because our good and loving God will still make this week holy.

Thanks be to God. Amen.