

Let us pray:

Holy God, sometimes life feels like a parade rushing by us as we stand on the sidelines and try not to miss it! There are hundreds of things that catch our eye, but the thing we fear missing the most is you. So, slow down the speed on this parade. Paint the colors of this world a little brighter. And dance through the words in our scripture passage until it is almost impossible for us to miss you there. God we are here. We are trying to pay attention. Gratefully we pray, amen.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke:

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it." So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

'Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!'

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Reflection:

We are now nearing the end of our Lenten journey and our exploration of the theme "Full to the Brim". Over the past few weeks we have been reminded of God's lavish love... of the abundance of God's grace. We have encountered Jesus as a mother hen, a prodigal son welcomed home, a fig tree nurtured with care and hope, precious oil poured out lovingly and freely and today we heard the story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem and the joyful praise of his disciples. Stories all

brimming with a gospel of grace – reminding us – hopefully – to live fully as we pursue justice and hope... as we express grief and gratitude.... discovering the expansive life God dreams for us.

Now I don't know about all of you... but for me, the reminders of God's love... and grace... the reminders of God's dream for us – have been hard to hold onto over the past few weeks. The ongoing uncertainty of this pandemic – hearing stories of hospitals continuing to be overwhelmed, medical staff burning out and the significant increase of serious mental health challenges – as well as stories of many in our own community struggling with grief, sickness, depression... and, of course, the ongoing news about the tragedy of war in the Ukraine – along with images of destruction, devastation and death – all of this has made the commitment to live in God's lavish love and to find places and moments of joy within it all – well... it hasn't been easy.

I'm not sure how many of you have been reading the daily devotions being sent out by email and posted on our social media... but I tell you – reading those each morning have definitely been much needed and appreciated reminders for me. Many times throughout the day, I would take out my phone and re-read the message for the day. The message today was a reminder that it is okay to cry out – to cry out with whatever it is we are holding in our hearts - joy, grief, pain and hosannas.

Now, to be honest, shouting out about the grief and pain isn't really difficult for me – although more often than I'd like to admit it comes out more like complaining about things outside of myself that I have zero control over than about those things in my heart that keep me in the suffering – and I somehow find it harder to remember to shout out my joy – even though I know darn well its there. My heart and mind often feel so conflicted – I want to feel joy – to celebrate – but I'm just not always sure how – or if I should. There is a war and a pandemic going on after all.

This, I think is why the opening line from the scripture story today struck an unexpected chord. *“After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem”*.

So, I realize that this is far from the most moving and inspirational Biblical quote. It is a rather meaningless passage and certainly not one we'd put to memory or cross stitch onto a pillow or anything. No one would miss these words if they were deleted all together... and yet they made me realize that today we are standing at a threshold.

You see when I read this line *“he went on ahead going up to Jerusalem”* a part of my heart rejoiced, because we all know what happens on the way to Jerusalem. We all know the joy of Palm Sunday... the story that this line introduces.

On the other hand, my heart faltered, because we all know what waits for Jesus IN Jerusalem... we know the story of suffering and pain... the story that this line ultimately points to.

So... on one side there is joy – and celebration... and on the other is fear and heartache. And today we stand right between both. Reading this line, realizing where we are standing, I found myself thinking that this is exactly how life feels right now. That just about every moment of our living we find ourselves standing at that threshold between joy and fear. And we're never too sure which way it's going to go.

Today of course marks the beginning of Holy Week. And while we often use the language of a journey throughout all of Lent, these next 7 days we tend to count our steps more closely. One step to the place called Mount of Olives, the next step towards the great city, **joy**-filled steps that take us through and then lead us towards an upper room. Sleepy steps take us to a garden where thunderous steps of soldiers approach and panicked steps of people running away. One step after another until we find ourselves standing beneath a cross. One step and then another until we find ourselves in front of a tomb.

But it all begins right here, at this threshold, and before the fear and anger and heartache take hold, there is dancing, and palms, and singing, and hope. On one side joy, on the other fear.

Now there is a part of me that wonders what the point is. I mean... if we know the heartache is coming, then why both with a party? Why mark this day at all if we know the suffering that it sets in motion?

As we listen to the story today, as we allow our imaginations to run and be filled with images of happy people, utterly unaware of what is about to happen, who see only the arrival of a man who they hope is going to save them... should we join in? Or would it be more faithful to stand silently on the margins observing? Should we stand vigil, stoic and stone faced in our knowing something they didn't know...the next part of the story?

Finding joy when we know fear is just a step away is perhaps one of the biggest struggles we endure. And while these last couple of years have heightened this feeling it's not at all new. Since the beginning of time Humans have been floundering under the weight of trying to keep it all together, building a life in the middle of chaotic times. And yet even when life is overwhelming and uncertain joy has this way of slipping in anyhow even when we don't intend to let it. Somehow the human spirit rises up and claims moments of happiness, just enough it seems to get us through that long night, or rough day, or heartbreaking moment.

We reluctantly... and with a bad attitude...take our persistent dog to the dog mucky dog park only to be greeted by a bouncy Bernese Mountain dog smiling so hard you can't help but smile with it.

Or we're standing in line at the grocery store feeling frustrated by how slow everyone seems to be moving when the toddler in the cart ahead of you starts playing peekaboo and giggles joyfully.

Or you get a post card from a new friend... just to say hi and express gratitude for your friendship.

All of which happened to me in the last week.

Or what about the video going around of a Ukrainian couple getting married, celebrating their love in the middle of a war zone.

Or another video of a little Ukrainian girl singing Disney's "let it go" in a bunker during an air raid.

Or the one of the medical staff at an overfull hospital recording themselves dancing to the newest TikTok trend.

And there's mornings like this... snow is melting, sun is shining, beautiful and faithful people have gathered in this place (or at home) for worship and a connection community. We gather here knowing that around the world things are a mess. That in our own city, maybe in our own homes, struggle grief and fear are our constant companions. And we could gather and stand here silently and no one would blame us. But I have a feeling that if we did then the stones beneath our feet would start to sing reminding us of God's lavish love and abundant grace.

This day, it is a threshold, joy on one side and fear on the other, reflecting how so many of us are feeling right now. How we are eager for joy to wash over us, even as we hold deep fear for those things we have little to no control over. And standing at this in between place can feel unsettling. But it is here that the power and truth of Jesus entire ministry and how it is able to impact our living in times like this comes into focus. Because today we welcome the one who came to meet us in our despair and who calls us to sing of hope in the face of it. Today we welcome the one who saw the anger and hatred that could live in human hearts and who calls us to speak words of love and mercy anyway. Today we welcome the one who turned his face to Jerusalem, and with the fear he no doubt held found the courage to make room for joy as well and who empowers us to do the same.

I'd like to end by showing you a video full of hope in the midst of fear.

Violinist Kerenza Peacock befriended some young violinists in Ukraine through Instagram. She discovered some were in shelters but had their violins. She asked colleagues from across the world to accompany them in harmony and was sent videos from 94 violinists in 29 countries within 48 hours. Illia Bondarenko, who you will see first on the video, had to film this between explosions because he could not hear himself play. They are playing an old Ukrainian folk song.

So lets watch and listen... and when the video ends, I invite us into a moment of quiet to allow the hope to settle in – before we sing our Hosannas.