

“Come, Follow Me Home”

Matthew 21:1-11

We will begin this sermon with Psalm 23 as paraphrased by the founder of Unity Church, Charles Fillmore in 1936:

The Lord is my...

The Lord is my banker; my credit is good.

He maketh me to lie down in the consciousness of omnipresent abundance;

He giveth me the key to his strongbox.

He restoreth my faith in his riches;

He guideth me in the paths of prosperity for His names sake.

Yea though I walk in the very shadow of debt,

I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me;

Thy silver and Thy gold, they secure me.

Thou preparest a way for me in the presence of the collector;

Thou fillest my wallet with plenty; my measure runneth over.

Surely goodness and plenty will follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall do business in the name of the Lord forever.

What do you notice about this version of the Psalm? How does it sit with the biblical image of Jesus as a humble and suffering servant? This kind of distortion of how God works is not new. At the time of Jesus, there were expectations of what the Messiah would do to save the people from oppression. The people imagined their savior to be a powerful military leader who would wage war against the occupying force of the Romans. We can relate to this sentiment. Think of oppressive forces like Putin and how we wish for armed resistance that would rid the world of their evil. But Jesus had a bigger plan for healing the world. He was working from the perspective of eternity. His vision was for the total transformation of the world so that the roots of evil in human hearts would be gone. He knew that a violent victory over an enemy was only a temporary measure for remedying the problem of evil in the world.

Jesus wanted his people to know that he was not going to resist evil with evil. He was not going to lead an army to a battle. He knew about the history of his people that in 63 BCE, Pompeii was the Roman general who conquered Israel and the Israelites found themselves under occupation. The Israelites were trying to get rid of the Romans. They hated the Romans for many reasons. The Romans made the Jews eat pork, which a Jew would never do. The Romans were forcing them to worship Caesar, which a Jew would never do. The Romans forbade circumcising their children, which the Jews would never do. The Romans were seducing them out of their Judaism. The Jews hated the Romans and there was a revolution going on. Sometime about the year 6-4 BCE, the great builder, King Herod, who had rebuilt their Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, 150 feet long and 150 feet high, a magnificent temple, turned from being Herod the Builder to Herod the Killer. He ordered that all boys two and under be killed. The killer king didn't want any baby messiah being born who would grow up to be a political king. About twelve years later, Zaduk the Pharisee led a revolution in and around Jerusalem and two thousand of his followers were killed. The Romans hung them up on crosses. Two thousand dead men hanging on

crosses for the entire world to see! Would that send a message to the Jewish population about what the Romans do with political revolutionaries?

The Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as a deliberate attempt by him to reveal himself as the peaceful Messiah. Matthew does this by quoting the prophet directly as he so often does. Matthew also alludes to it by Jesus' choice of a donkey to ride by sending two of his disciples into Bethphage to bring him the humblest of animals. Zechariah's prophecy symbolized the peaceful choice of a victorious king selecting a donkey as his ride instead of a conqueror's proud steed for his triumphal entry into his capital city. So, despite all of his teachings and his riding a humble donkey for his entry, still people misunderstood who Jesus was.

Though Jesus had no intention of being king, his disciples and others thwarted him by throwing their garments and branches before him as Jehu had been hailed as king in 2 Kings 9:13. According to the Mishnah of the 2nd century CE, the custom had precedents in the celebration of the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) when pilgrims collected twigs or branches of myrtle, willow or palm to be bound together in a festal plume, called a lulab to symbolize rejoicing. Waving these lulabs, the pilgrims paraded into the courts of the temple singing the Hallel.

Jesus' humility and rejection of fighting evil with evil is a challenge and a blessing for us today. It helps us to see the falsehoods of our egos about power, violence, and control. It reminds us that in order for us to live in light of eternity, we have to take the long view of history. In fact, we have to see history in light of eternity. Through God's eternal vision, we know that the transformation of hearts and minds is the only way to redeem our world.

The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams tells the story about a young man in one of her congregations, an advertising executive on the rise in his profession. Every Tuesday night he volunteered at the foot clinic for the homeless people who made their home in the church gymnasium. Robert was his name. He was the best dresser she had ever seen. She says, "I can picture him now in my mind's eye, wearing a crisp shirt, red suspenders. I see him sitting on a stool before the chair on which one of our homeless guests is sitting. He takes the guest's feet and places them in a basin of warm water. He takes a towel and dries the feet. He applies ointment to their sores. The ritual ends with the gift of a clean, white pair of socks. I see the man in the chair, as he slips his socks on, brush a tear from his own cheek-a tough guy whom no one has touched with tenderness in a very long time. I once asked Robert, the advertising executive on the move, why he came to the foot clinic every week. He brushed me aside, saying, 'I figure I have a better chance of running into Jesus here than most places. That's all.' I watched him week after week. I realized as I watched him that I was developing my own sort of double vision. I was seeing Christ in the stranger that he served. I was also seeing Christ in the one who was finding deep meaning in his life through serving others."

We will end with a contemplative reading of Matthew 21: <https://vimeo.com/402973500>. Amen.