
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Keep Spreading Those Cloaks

A Sermon by

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Scripture: Luke 19:28-40

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Jesus had not been to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover since he was twelve years old. It had been a long time, more than twenty years ago, but he could remember the sights, the smells, the sounds, in every cell of his body.

Jesus remembered it all. How his family, Mary, Joseph, his brothers and sisters, packed up food and clothing, tents, cooking utensils, the money they had saved, to make the trek to Jerusalem. Ten days of walking. Walking with thousands of others. More than one hundred thousand pilgrims would pour into a city whose normal population was about thirty thousand.¹

Jesus and his family were often ahead of the crowds because they would meet up with Zechariah and his son John. Zechariah was a priest and all able bodied priests in Palestine arrived in Jerusalem ahead of the worshippers. They had to prepare themselves for their sacred service, and then they had to prepare—to purify—the Temple and its precincts for the remembrance of the Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. ‘Uncle Zechariah’ was old even back in those days, Jesus remembered, and his cousin John was old enough to know the way, to lead the donkey, to find both food and drink for his father, to arrange places of rest every other hour in the day. Zechariah liked getting there early to secure a room in one of the houses owned by the Temple. He wanted his family, his whole family, to eat the Passover meal within the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

Passover is the first and most important of the Jewish feasts. Commanded by God 2,000 years earlier than Jesus, it commemorates the exodus of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Passover marked the beginning of their nation and defined them as God’s people. Passover retells the miraculous story of how God brought God’s people out of Egypt and to contemplate how God will redeem Israel by sending the Messiah. Just as God had saved God’s people when the angel of the Lord had ‘passed over’ the homes of the Israelites and afflicted the homes of the Egyptians, it was believed that God would come again at Passover to save God’s people.

Uncle Zechariah was now long gone. Jesus remembered that last Passover with him. Twelve years old and lost for three days in the words of Temple priests and teachers. Oh, Mother Mary was worried to death, just the start of her worries actually, for she knew, she knew, she would lose him again.

Even now, Jesus could hear the trumpet blast, and see the ‘diminished figure of the man standing halfway to heaven. His perch...the topmost corner of the gates of the Holy Mount, the southwest pinnacle of the Temple’²...three trumpet blasts calling the pilgrims to bring their animals for sacrifice...doves, sheep, goats, lambs. He and Joseph and John had brought their sheep to Zechariah, the priest, and as Joseph offered the sacrifice and the blood sprang forth, Zechariah caught the blood on a silver tray and carefully walked it into the Temple, splashing the altar with a few drops of fresh blood. “O Lord, I am your servant,” the Levites sang.

¹ Walter Wangerin, Jr., *Jesus: A Novel*, p. 17.

² *Ibid*, p. 22

That song rang in Jesus' ears now. It would not be long; his time had come. There was no turning back. Twenty years had been long enough to know his truth, God's truth: Love wins. Hate does not win. Love wins. And love is not a feeling, it is an ability.³ Love is an ability that all people have. Some choose to use it. Others choose to ignore it, or override it with fear. Jesus had seen fear often enough. Fear of the Romans, fear of not having enough, fear of falling short, fear of letting go, fear of fully trusting, fear of fully becoming what God had created God's earth creatures to be...humans who had God's breath within them, humans who became God's hands and hearts and voices. Jesus remembered the stories that others had told him about his birth, how angels had said, "Fear not" and how shepherds had heard multitudes singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace". Would his riding into Jerusalem now bring peace?

Jesus wanted nothing less than peace, wholeness, shalom, gratitude to God for all things. He lived his life in peace. He prayed for peace. He taught others the way to peace.

In peace, Jesus pulled his *tallit*, his outer woolen mantle or cloak closer around him. Was the chill from the orchard on the Mount of Olives and the morning dew? Or was the chill from within, that moment of asking, "Am I ready for this?" A *Tallit* had tassels on its four corners. The word meant 'little tent' and the tassels on the corners reminded them of God's commandments: Love God with all your heart, and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. The crowd, the multitude of disciples, joyfully cheering in a loud voice, maybe weeping with joy, pulled their *tallits* off over their heads, laying down their prayer shawls, their little tents, their holy tabernacles: Now is the time. Here is the one.

Now is the time for us also. It is time for us to keep throwing down our cloaks, our *tallits*, our little tents of prayer, for the ways of peace. In a world...an American culture...that is increasingly not only divided, but polarized and polarizing, now is the time for peace.

Where will we throw our cloaks down?

We say we are an open and affirming congregation, open to all people, working for justice and peace for all people. So will we throw our cloaks down for health care for all? Will we throw our cloaks down for immigration reform? Will we throw our cloaks down to get out of Afghanistan and Iraq? Will we throw our cloaks down for education for our children and our grandchildren? Will we throw our cloaks down for the working poor? For our seniors and persons with disabilities?

I am sure we are not of one voice or mind on any of these very pressing, weighty, heart rendering issues of our day. As long as we call them 'issues' we can think they are 'out there'. As soon as we say, "Mary lost her job and her health insurance this week." "Our friend Alfonso was detained and handcuffed at the border last Saturday even though he is an American citizen." "Child care subsidies

³ Dan in Real Life, DVD.

are no longer available so Tom, who works two jobs, has to decide how to work and keep his children safe.” As soon as we put faces and relationships and stories on the words, our hearts are opened and compassion awakens our peace, shalom, wholeness and holiness.

I am so excited about Palm Sunday this year. We thought of changing the name to Cloak Sunday. I am excited because I believe that now is the time and we are ready. Now is the time for us to speak out as a progressive and open church. Now is the time for us to continue to open wide our doors and welcome all the people in. Now is the time for us to focus on our ministries of compassion and hope. Now is **not** the time to withdraw from the need, to shrink from the challenge, to circle the wagons and hoard our supplies. Now is the time to expose our relevance, making more, not less, room at the table.

Last Sunday, our youth, junior high and senior highs, preached about God doing a new thing. With some music that was probably too loud, and some words that were probably spoken too fast, they poured out their prayers for their future and for this congregation. And they were great. One of the kids, not even a churchgoer here, came at the invitation of a friend and sang a song “Dare You to Move”. The song haunted me all week and I looked up the lyrics.

Welcome to the planet
Welcome to existence
Everyone’s here
Everybody’s watching you now
Everybody waits for you now.
I dare you to move.
I dare you to lift yourself up off the floor.

Welcome to the fallout
Welcome to resistance
The tension is here
Between who you are and who you could be
Between how it is and how it should be
I dare you to move.
Where you gonna run to escape from yourself?
Where you gonna go?
Salvation is here.
I dare you to move.
I dare you to lift yourself up off the floor.
I dare you move.

Church of the Beatitudes, I dare you to move. My prayer this Palm Sunday, is that we move together. Amen.