March 20, 2016   
Luke 19:29-42   
“The Gift of Misfits”

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Luke 19:29-42 New Revised Standard Version

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.” As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”

CONTEMPORARY READING (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks and feels with us, and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.

Palm Sunday! I love the next week in the life of the church. I love the ritual of this week as we move through Holy Week to Easter. I find value in the ritual of gathering together on Maundy Thursday and celebrating Communion together. I find value in hearing the story of Jesus’ crucifixion on Good Friday. I find value in the waiting of Holy Saturday and seeing Sandy Hitz become Mary, the mother of Jesus in her play. I love coming to church in the darkness of Easter Sunday morning for the sunrise service and seeing the sun come up on that new day of hope. And I know as we walk through this week that I am not alone, because we are all holding on to each other, we are holding each other upright and reminding each other that we are connected.

When I was 11 years old my family went to Chile to see Halley's Comet. On Palm Sunday we went to church in the little town we were staying. At one point in the service the church doors were flung open and we marched around the outside of the church singing a song in Spanish. So may we know that throughout the world Christian people are celebrating this day with us. It is a day to sing, a day to rejoice.

During Lent this year we have been talking about “Gifts of the Dark Wood,” and as we have been in this time of self-reflection in preparation for Easter we have been talking about those Dark Wood moments of our lives. We have thought about those times when we are disillusioned, afraid, or lost, and explored how God’s presence remains with us, providing opportunities for new growth and transformation. We enter the Dark Wood because we struggle. And in the Dark Wood it is possible to be moved and transformed. We talked about Gifts of the Dark Wood: uncertainty, emptiness, being thunderstruck, getting lost and temptation. We talked about how uncertainty can help us let go of our fear of the unknown. Emptiness can leave room for new possibilities. Thunderstruck moments can offer insight. Getting lost invites us to heighten our awareness. Temptation can help us know our true path.

The final gift of the Dark Wood are other travelers or misfits on the journey who enrich our experience of life and love. It is those who have gone before or who are going with us. In the Dark Wood Elnes says, “walking alone is about as advisable as walking alone in a physical dark wood. It’s easy to get lost without the aid of companions… While we all walk our paths as individuals, the lone seeker is more likely to get lost or to give up than the one who travels in company” (150). Jesus traveled with his community of fellow misfits. A misfit is someone who is being as intentional as you are about embracing the gifts of the Dark Wood and finding their place in this world (157). A misfit is comfortable with the sadness of the Dark Wood. They allow for you to be you. They share their own experiences and help us not be afraid.

I don't imagine any of us enjoy calling ourselves and our friends misfits. If you are struggling with this term as a self identifier, look again at Jesus and his disciples. They were not rock stars. They were not famous politicians. They were not Oscar winning actors. Yet when the people threw their cloaks down and made a red carpet for Jesus, he said this is how it must be. "If these were silent, even the stones would shout out." A thirty something man riding on a donkey and the stones would shout if the people did not? What a misfit. And we are honored to call ourselves misfits and follow such a life of love. Two thousand years after this event, we are remembering it and imagining our place in it. We cannot remember Oscar winning movies or politicians or sports stars but we remember and celebrate each and every event in Holy Week.

Today as we begin the journey of Holy Week, I invite us all to look around at our church family, those who are right here with us. We are blessed with the presence of others who see us, who reflect with us, and discover the riches of a life lived in intention. As Jesus comes into Jerusalem at the beginning of that fateful week, he is surrounded by those who will live the uncertainty, temptation and emptiness right alongside him.

Then on Thursday night at the Passover, Jesus shared a meal with his friends. He explained to them that soon he would no longer be with them as he had been before; from now on his presence would be different. Jesus, who would call upon them to live lives of service, bent down and washed their feet—every last one of them. Then they shared a meal and he took bread, and broke it and gave it to them and said, “Take and eat, this is my body broken for you.” He took a cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant between us—drink all of it.” “Soon I will be gone,” he said. “Do this to remember me and to remember what I taught you.”

Jesus welcomed all of them to the table and every one of them was a saint and a sinner, a good person created in the image of God, and a lost soul full of regrets and shame and failure. We share that goodness and that brokenness with those disciples. And like them, even though we have failed, we are forgiven. God loves us.

This week is a time of loss. We all know loss in our lives: the loss of a job, a spouse, perhaps even a child. We endure the loss of health or vitality we once had, the loss of a core belief that we once held quite strongly, or the loss of something for which we had hoped, perhaps the loss of a dream.

Religion is irrelevant if we never talk about loss in church. If we sing only happy songs or tell only the stories with happy endings we are being dishonest with each other about life. The house of God must be a place where we can think about and experience loss. The house of God must be such a place so that we will never forget an important truth: that the God who created this world and all of us knows loss.

This week we consider the cross. We must consider that the tomb to which Jesus goes is not a tunnel with light at the end; it is a cave where there is total darkness. It is a place where even God realizes the pain of loss. Only in fully knowing that truth can we promise one another that there is nowhere we can go in life or even in death, where God will not go with us. Amen.