

Sermon: Enter: Jesus
Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: April 9, 2017

I don't know for certain, but I don't think that Jesus came to change anyone. I mean, there were many people he reasonably could have gone into Jerusalem for the purpose of trying to change them - the Roman authorities and the religious leaders colluding with Rome, being one example. Maybe he should have tried to change them, but I don't think he did.

They were mighty in their positions of power; sitting in their posh seats and eating from their bountiful tables and wielding weaponry of great violence to maintain the Peace of Rome and the prestige of Jerusalem. They could have used someone giving them a taster of their own medicine; their heavy taxes impoverishing the needy to line their own pockets, their tactics of nailing criminals to wooden crosses and posting them along the roadways to show the cost of disobedience and dissidence. But those men weren't about to change. They defined how things would go and even what the truth was - remember what Pilate said to Jesus - "what is truth?" -- you have your facts, I have mine - and they weren't about to entertain those who offered an alternative truth to theirs.

The other authorities in Jerusalem, the religious ones who by hook and crook and a delicate balance of deference to God and deference to Rome, had found a way to maintain their own religious structures and authority without angering Caesar and Herod. They

were a vital part of keeping the masses in check. Religion is always appreciated by the state when it helps to make docile obedient citizens. But docile and obedient citizens in the oppressive state of Rome was only for the benefit of those in power, not so much for the common good. So the religious leaders needed some changing too. They were too much in bed with Rome and had forsaken too far the commands of the Lord to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. I can't believe Jesus didn't come to change them but that's not why he entered Jerusalem that day.

Nor do I think he was there to change the masses of people, you know, all those who laid their cloaks and their palms on the road before him as he rode through the gates of Jerusalem on the colt. They were the ones who were suffering at the hands of those on the inside of the Jerusalem and they were hungry and resentful, some of them, and desperate for change. They had been told for centuries in their holy scriptures that one would come – from the Davidic line - who would deliver them from the hand of the enemy, one who would finally make right all that was wrong, listen to them, notice them, lift them up and save them. They had heard about Jesus of Nazareth, his healings and his teachings and the way he spoke with a supernal authority and they remembered the words of the ancient prophet Zechariah whose teaching they knew well:

Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion! Shout loud, O daughter of Jerusalem, Lo your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion

shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth!

And so when Jesus chose to enter into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus, the one so many had pinned their hopes and expectations on, they were certain the Messiah had arrived, the Anointed One, not just Jesus of Nazareth but Jesus the Christ. So they shouted their hosannas: “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

But it was not long, just days really, before their excitement and their waiting-with-baited-breath turned toxic when no revolution was ignited. Jesus did overturn some tables in the temple but then walked away and collected himself and holed up with his closest companions, eating dinner and allowing women to publicly anoint him with oil and began waiting for what was to come. “What kind of revolutionary was he? What kind of Messiah would be so passive? You mean he wasn’t here to change the power structure and stick it to the man?” They were not thrilled when they realized Jesus wasn’t here to change those on the inside and though they hardened their hearts against him and fed him into the maw of Roman power, he accepted it, because he was there to change them either.

As I said, Jesus didn’t come to change anyone.

Instead, you see, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to change himself... to allow himself to be changed. All the change that was needed in the world for millennia before and for millennia to come gathered itself in and through him and changed him alone. No one else changed in those

days, except maybe transformation began in those few women who stood faithfully as witness to his changing body and his changing soul.

They watched as He rode into Jerusalem in quiet resigned humility and they watched as a storm of anger gathered across his spirit and he overturned tables in the temple. They watched as he gathered affectionately and heavy-hearted with his friends for a last meal, and they heard that he trembled in fear and sweated blood in the garden at what was coming. They heard that his prayers and teachings and laughter of the years before drew to an haunting silence before Pilate, and they watched as his body received the scars from the scourging in the courtyard and was torn by his execution at Golgotha, and they watched in the anguished silence as his utterly changed lifeless body was removed from the cross and laid in the tomb. He was the only one in Jerusalem those days who changed and in his willingness to be changed in himself rather than to change anyone else around him... he, more than anyone else, changed the world.

Benediction:

Will - Before this week ends, the Palm branches will be drying by the roadside, the joyful crowd will walk away some in anger, some in despair, and Jesus will replace robes of victory with a crown of thorns

Judy - So go forth into this Holy Week with the knowledge of how deep and how far God's love extends and may God bless you, uphold you, and give you strength for the journey, amen.