

Circle of Mercy Sermon
Luke 19: 28-42
March 20, 2016 (Palm Sunday)

Have you noticed the pattern? People get excited about Jesus until he gets specific, until he tells them and shows them what faithfulness to God looks like.

It's how Luke starts Jesus' ministry. Remember? In chapter 4, Jesus, fresh from his time in the desert, goes back home to offer his first sermon. It starts off great. He pulls out the Isaiah scroll and reads, "The Lord has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Who can argue with that? They loved him. "That's our homeboy", they shouted. Then, Jesus got specific. He pointed to when God used the widow of Zapheth, an outsider, to save Elijah and others from starvation...or when God used Elisha to heal the enemy, the Syrian General Namaan. Suddenly the homeboy was crossing the line, the other side of which was a much bigger understanding of God's love and mercy, of who is in and who is out, of the things that truly make for peace.

Well, the love/hate affair continues today. This story is a beautiful example of public liturgy, of holy street theater. Jesus' triumphal entry connects him to Zechariah's prophecy, "Lo, your king comes to you...humble and riding on a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem...he shall command peace to the nations." Who can argue with that? Everybody is for peace. Those gathered on the Jerusalem streets for Passover would have known this prophecy and recognized Jesus' dramatization of it. The problem comes when Jesus gets specific, turning over money changers' tables, revealing the hypocrisy of the religious and political power, forgiving his followers AND those who are killing him...all the things that truly make for peace.

Apparently, at least according to Jesus, the year of the Lord's favor and the things that make for peace are powerfully particular. They ask us to let go of something that's hard to let go off, something we think we cannot live without and trust something better, albeit something that we can't see or manage.

I was recently told that I am in the "Lost Generation". Who knew? You probably did. I didn't? But biblically speaking, isn't it usually the case that those who are lost are the very ones who think they are not.

Now you might think that would be an upsetting thing to hear, but what was most surprising was how it registered in my body. I felt relief. You know those sensations that occur when you are in the presence of truth, that's what I felt. In ways I am only beginning to understand, I think I carry the lostness of this historical time, of this culture of this nation...and I think you do to, I think we all do.

AND, maybe being lost is exactly where we need to be. While I increasingly believe that lostness and Exodus are the narratives for the church in our time, it also seems to be the necessary posture for Holy Week if we are to receive its gifts. We need to be lost, to claim it, to see it as a prerequisite for being a Spirit-led people. Let us not forget that this week was a Holy Week for Jesus. It was Passover, the time to remember the lostness in Egypt and the long journey through the wilderness to rediscovering a life with and in God.

Every word and gesture of Jesus this week invites us to recognize the things that make for peace, that things that move us from lostness to foundness. But dare I say that none are more important than this seder meal that Jesus shares with his followers, this meal of remembering and reenacting the Exodus journey from lostness to foundness.

A couple of weekends ago, I backed into a tree, yet another painful reminder of my lostness. So I call Danny at the body shop I use and asked him if he could bang things around enough to replace by busted out taillight and get by tailgate working again. He said, "bring it on in." In the midst of our conversation, I asked him if, by chance, he knew of where I might find an old camper shell to put on the truck so I can haul my goats around when I need to. I explained that I had been looking and the right size is hard to find. He paused and said, "Buddy, this is your lucky day". Danny went on to explain that he just last year bought an old Chevy S10 (the only other truck that's the same size as mine) and it came with a camper shell that he does not want. It's just taking up space in his yard. I responded, "I would love to buy it from you." He said, "we will talk about that when you get here." When I showed up to get my truck, it had a new tail light and the camper shell was attached. It was perfect. Just what I was hoping for. When I went to pay my bill, I asked him how much I owed him for the camper shell. He said "nothing" and that I was doing him a favor by getting it out of his yard. I resisted and suggest that I at least pay him \$100..., when he resisted I said \$75...we went back and forth like that for awhile until he said, "Mark, you don't have to pay for everything."

Derek's graciousness exposes some of the roots of my lostness, and the foundness this meal offers us. I so easily and unconsciously see the world through the lens of commodity. It's to be managed, controlled, exchanged, bought and sold, assessed for monetary value. Tragically, our culture teaches us to instinctively do this with both the non-human and human expressions of Creation. It just seems so hard to recognize that it's all gift and to believe that the source of such gifts will keep giving.

In some essential way, is this not the root of violence and war? As Isaiah tells us, we so easily spend our wages and our lives on what fails to satisfy. Can we awaken our lives our bodies to the wild graciousness of God and be satisfied? That invitation, I believe, is at the heart of this meal. To come, as the Psalmist says, to taste and see, to pay attention to the sensations of the bread and the wine, to follow it in our bodies as it settles in those places that recognize satisfaction, that make space for grace and become the seeds for peace. Henri Nouwen gives us a wonderful image for the movement of faith. He quotes a famous trapeze artist who explained that the hardest part of what he does is learning "to not catch the catcher...learning to release and trust that you will be caught."

This week is about the great re-ordering of power. A thread through it all is Jesus living out the truth that God is God and we are not. We are here to savor and share the wild graciousness of God. We are here to taste, see and be satisfied. We are here to stop trying to catch the catcher instead allow ourselves to be caught. Let us prepare to receive this meal.