

Busy: Give It a Rest - *Mark 11:11-19*

Norwalk Christian Church, April 12, 2019, Palm Sunday, Year C, Busy Series

Who doesn't like a parade?! Palm Sunday was certainly a parade to see. The singing and chanting. The palms and cloaks lying on the ground. The fanfare for the Messiah. It was a celebration to behold.

Today marks the end of Lent. We are in Holy Week now. And right before Holy Week began, Marti and I and Kelley Davis met with our JYF students, the 3rd through 5th graders, after school on Fat Tuesday. Mardi Gras, the day before Ash Wednesday when Lent officially begins.

On that day, Marti talked about Mardi Gras, how originally it was a celebration that brought about equality. People would wear masks and parade and celebrate. The masks may have provided anonymity, but it also made everyone equal. Rich or poor--you couldn't tell. Everyone seemed equal. Everyone celebrated together.

When we lived in New Orleans, we loved going to the parades. Throughout the season of Epiphany, there were parades (and most of them family friendly). On Mardi Gras day, however, there are two big parades. The first is Rex. It, historically, was the biggest, the grandest. It became the parade of the wealthy. The connected. The elite of the City. When the parade passes the grandstand, the mayor stands and offers a toast to that year's King Rex, the King of Mardi Gras.

But there's another parade on Fat Tuesday in New Orleans. Zulu. Historically, black citizens of New Orleans were not allowed in the different Mardi Gras crews. They couldn't join with Rex and others, so they started their own Krewe, Zulu, and their own parade. No one was going to stop them from having a parade.

They used to pass through the segregated back roads of New Orleans. Today, Zulu is on the main streets, and King Zulu, too, gets toasted by the Mayor and other dignitaries. And then the two kings, Rex and Zulu, meet up. Toast one another. It's a moment of harmony, of healing, and the recognition of our common humanity and the original, equal spirit of Mardi Gras. But what happens after the parade is over?

Our text today happens after the parade is over. I might have rained on our parade when I chose our primary scripture reading. This text begins on Palm Sunday, just after the parade ended, but then takes us to Holy Monday. As the parade of Palm Sunday ends, the Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus goes into the temple. He looks around. Then he goes to the suburb town of Bethany, where he stays with his friends.

And he wakes up on Monday, the Monday before Friday when the whole world will change, and he travels back to Jerusalem. Goes into the temple. And he gets angry. Holy anger. The kind of anger you get when you see injustice.

Whatever he saw the night before set him off. He went home. He stewed on it. He thought about doing nothing. Saying nothing. Not reacting. After all, the pressure was already on. They were already trying to catch him. Stop him. Kill him.

But he had to do something. So he made a plan. He woke up the next morning, made the trip back to Jerusalem, entered the temple. Then he walked up to the table where they were changing money--people making a profit off of worshippers who had traveled so far to pay their respects, yet told their money from their home wasn't good in God's house. And Jesus turns over these tables of exploitation.

He goes over to the dove-sellers, these people who were selling animals for sacrifice, pure doves. Because the doves you brought with you weren't good enough. You had to buy another, who cares if you were poor. You had to sacrifice. God demands it, the temple taught!

And Jesus saw it, and he knocked over the cages of the pure doves. He turned over their tables. He ran them all out of the temple. He yelled. He tore the place up.

“Give it a rest! My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?”
But you have made it a den of robbers.”

And the chief priests and the scribes--those arrogant religious leaders who set the whole system up, who cashed the checks--they saw it and were furious, and began to set in motion a plot to assassinate Jesus.

Over the season of Lent, we've been talking about being Busy, and about how God calls us to find rest. We began with Jesus' words, “Come to me, all you who weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.”

During this worship series, in Sunday School, we've been studying the Ten Commandments, and a few weeks ago we looked at the commandment for Sabbath: “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy,” the commandment says. But there's more to the commandment. The commandment calls for us to take a rest--to take a break, like God took a break after 6 days of creation. For 6 days you should labor, but the 7th day should be a day of rest--a Sabbath. Sabbath means rest.

But the commandment goes on. You shouldn't just rest, but your children should, as well. And your livestock. And your servants, the hired hands, and even slaves--male and female. Even the foreigners among you, those who are not a part of your culture or faith--they, too, should rest.

The principle of the Sabbath Day is that everyone--everyone--should work 6 days, but get paid enough for 7, because everyone deserves a rest.

But it doesn't happen this way. Hourly workers, if given the day off, only lose their pay. People work two jobs to make ends meet, working at the restaurants on weekends so that they can feed us after church, working minimum wage jobs making \$7.25 an hour, 40 hours a week, \$15,080 a year. Around the world, workers are exploited in order to produce the goods we so readily use and then discard.

You and I--we deserve a rest. We are too busy. But this principle of rest, of Sabbath, reminds us that we are not the only ones who deserve a rest. All God's people--every human and even the animals, the ancient text tells us, deserves a rest. Give it a rest! Give everyone one and everything a rest, God says.

Without a doubt, some that cheered for Jesus on Palm Sunday, "Hosanna! Hosanna!," ended up outside that kangaroo court on Friday chanting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

"How fickle our praise," the hymn we began with. "We often lose sight." We lose sight of the truth of the Gospel, that God loves us. That God loves us--just as we are. That we don't have to produce to be blessed. We don't have to succeed to be loved. We are imperfect, but God loves us that way.

But if it's true of us, it's true of all God's creation. And to believe it about ourselves is to declare it true of all of humanity.

There should not be two parades--those who are on the inside and those who are on the outside. And the temple--God's house--should be a place of prayer--a place of rest for the nations, and all God's people.

Last Wednesday, I saw something beautiful. I walked by one of the rooms where we were doing ELL classes, and at the table was a young woman with a test. And two of our church members, Betsy and Becky, were helping her figure out an algebra problem. The young woman was wearing the Hijab. She was preparing for the GED. And these two women were helping her, but couldn't figure out the math problem. They asked me--clearly they don't know me well. I had no clue. All I saw were lines and numbers and xs. It was utter nonsense. So, I grabbed Hannah Jameson--she's a senior. She's learned this stuff. And Hannah came and helped. Then Mark Durham, with his accountant brain, came and helped. And together, four adults helped this young woman figure out her problem.

Now, the table they were sitting at didn't turn over, but tables turned over in that moment. Injustice was combated. Hope was given. Four white Christians helped a young, Somali, muslim, refugee woman figure out a math problem. And right in our

church basement, she found rest from the burden of that challenge, and maybe—just a little bit more—our church became a house of prayer for all people.

The call of Palm Sunday, is not to just to parade in here, celebrating the love and rest Jesus gives us, but to parade out of here, carrying that rest to those who so desperately need it. To turn over tables, if we need to. To run the exploiters and the crooks out of the way, if we need to.

As church, we worship, but we also turn over tables, so that everyone may find rest for their souls.

Waving palms and turning over tables--maybe that should be our new mission statement.

For we must never be too busy that we miss God's work of justice in this world.

Hosanna! Amen!