

Threads Laid Bare on the Road

April 10, 2022 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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Texts: Luke 19: 28-40

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you Oh God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

With this worship service, Holy Week begins as it does every year, but this year feels different to me. Seeing us all with our palms in the familiar space of the sanctuary, hearing Hosanna in the air as we processed into worship, looking at the camera on the pillar knowing that those who are online are also embodied with their palms in their own way, fills my heart with comfort and maybe you are feeling the same way too. These familiar marks of Palm Sunday call our attention to the connections deep tradition and long held story cultivate. We need this reminder of the shared story of our faith after these past couple of years. We need a way in to acknowledge both mystery and knowing, both liminality and reorientation, both the familiarity of who we are and acknowledging that things have changed, leaving space for both possibility and uncertainty. This practice of looking at our experiences in this life as a part of a dynamic and ever unfolding story held in community, not as either/or, but both/and, is a part of what our faith teaches us.

We share this narrative, a common thread that weaves its way through the moments of our lives- as we experience joy and as we live with our grief. It connects us together, tying us to a kind of belonging that draws us closer to God's unimaginable grace, love embodied, in other words, the story of Jesus. We share this story not because we all have the same perspective on it in the world or even in this hybrid community of faith, but because it is a part of us. The truth

of it exists in between the rhythm of our heartbeats, weaving our existence together with our ancestors who heard the same words that ended up changing their lives too. There is power in telling this sacred passion story year after year in all kinds of circumstances.

When I think about what makes up our sense of our faith I often remember something that a mentor of mine once said to me. She reminded me that people travel through life carrying the sacred stories of their scripture and the sacred stories of their lives and both make up the story of their faith. This holy week we come together to honor the ties that connect us as followers of Jesus, as members of this church and the church universal. During Holy Week this year we will look together at the images of clothes and threads in these all too familiar stories of Jesus' journey to the cross and resurrection and reflect on what they have to teach us about our connection to our faith and one another. This morning you may have received a simple bracelet made with hemp strings, a symbol of the threads that connect us and the images of thread found in the stories of holy week. If you haven't received one and would like one, please let someone know and we will get it to you. Grounded with this reminder of our relationship to the Christian tradition, we come together to tell the story of our faith again today, beginning with Jesus' procession into Jerusalem, the traditional Palm Sunday text and our reading for this morning.

The beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross mimics a triumphal march, a procession that would be done in honor of a king or successful general. With the crowd cheering, celebrating his arrival as a kind of king, his disciples joyfully shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Usually we mark this joy and celebration by waving palm branches in the air, drawing attention to the palms that were thrown on the road as Jesus rode

his way into Jerusalem. It is interesting that on this Palm Sunday our reading from the Gospel of Luke does not mention the word palms once. In fact, the only time palms are explicitly mentioned in this portion of our scripture in any of the Gospels is in the Gospel of John. What is laid on the colt that Jesus rides and upon the road that he follows into Jerusalem is a collection of cloaks. As Jesus makes his way into the city, the disciples without hesitation lay down their cloaks to create a road for him, a way to honor him as a king. Cloaks are pieces of clothing, made of threads, not unlike the ones on our bracelets, that are made to protect or shield the wearer. In that moment, Jesus' disciples were called into a kind of vulnerability that Jesus' kingdom requires. The disciples lay down what separates them from one another and the elements of the world. What does it mean for us to lay down the things that separate us from vulnerability and connection at the feet of Jesus? What does it look like to pave a way for Jesus as our center, what must we leave behind?

When we lay down our attachment to our individuality our acknowledgement of our dependence on one another reveals our vulnerability, and with that acknowledgement of our vulnerability Jesus calls us to deepen our relationships with one another and with God. The collection of cloaks of Jesus' disciples literally create a path that enables Jesus to show up as their king in the world. How do we do the same? How do we see the ways in which Jesus is interrupting our usual ways of being?

In her essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" Audre Lorde, an American writer, feminist, womanist, and civil rights activist, reminds us "without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression." We are carrying so much in our hearts these days: the violence in Ukraine, sick family members, stress at work, the pain of processing moral injury, a loss of

income, complicated grief, the responsibility of parenting children in this violent and turbulent world, the all too familiar consistency of disorientation. In order to survive we might have built up our defenses and our ways of coping so high that there is less room for us to see that we aren't alone in these struggles, that we are fundamentally connected to one another and reliant upon each other. As we walk with Jesus into Jerusalem this week I invite us to ask ourselves what do we need to lay down in order to fully embrace the story of our faith? Is it the myth of perfectionism? Our need to be right? Our anger or our isolation? Our lack of trust in others? Our shame about our struggles? Perhaps even our fear of our own vulnerability?

Whatever it may be for us, when we collectively lay down the walls that we have put up, we give authentic connection and community room to flourish, we contribute to our collective liberation. This is easy to say, and hard to accomplish. It takes time and patience with ourselves and with one another. Opening up our hearts and leaving our patterns that have helped us survive in the past is hard work. It requires courage and the knowledge that we aren't doing it alone. It requires us to remember the ties that bind us as Christian community and as persons of faith. The ties that have always been there since the beginning. So, let's not do it alone, but together with Jesus and his sacred story by our side as we look with him to the cross. Amen.