

Matthew 21:1-11 Palm Sunday Turmoil

Today Jesus is entering the most troubled place in the world. It is a place of struggle, conflict and confrontation. It has a history of killing the prophets, fighting wars, and living in violence. It is a place in turmoil. The most troubled place in the world is not, however, a geographic location. The human heart is the most troubled place in our world. It was then and it is now.

Look at the history of the world. Look at present day Jerusalem, the wars, fighting, and protests throughout the Middle East, the American political and economic systems as well as those in the UK and you will see the symptoms of the turmoil that fills the heart of humanity. We see it in world events and we experience it in our own lives especially during this Coronavirus pandemic. It's in the fear and uncertainty of our future, the loss of financial security, a broken marriage, estrangement between parent and child, the disease that interrupts life's plans. Each of us could name and describe our personal turmoil.

Think about a time of turmoil in your life and you will likely recall how the foundations of your world were and are being shaken. Turmoil challenges our beliefs and faith, confronts the way we have always done things, makes us question where we are going. In the midst of turmoil life, people, and maybe even God do not line up with our expectations and what we have come to believe. When that happens we mostly want things, people, God back in alignment. We don't often think about realigning ourselves but that is the opportunity turmoil gives. Instead we want life to go back to

the way it was before. Some will pray God to fix the problem and end the turmoil. Others will come to church seeking answers to or an escape from the turmoil of our lives and world. But on this day there is no escape. There is no easy answer.

Jesus is entering Jerusalem, the heart of a people, the identity of a nation, the foundation of a religion. We are that city and we are shaken, agitated, and confronted every time Jesus comes to us and if we are not maybe we should be. He turns our world upside down. That's what Jesus does. That may not be who we want but that is who He is.

If given a choice I suspect most prefer a domesticated Jesus; one who brings peace and security, one who makes life easy and happy. That is not what Jesus is about. Jesus is the saviour not a superhero. He has been bringing turmoil from the day he was born.

- When King Herod heard that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem King of the Jews Herod and all Jerusalem with him were troubled, shaken, in turmoil (Mt. 2:1-3).
- Jesus called James and John to leave their nets, boat and father (Mt. 4:18-22), the very foundation on which their life and identity had been built.
- He ate with the wrong kind of people, tax collectors and sinners (Mt.9:10-12).
- He sent out the twelve apostles telling them, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes

will be members of one's own household" (Mt. 10:34-36). Jesus separates us from the things and people we most often think hold our life together.

- He broke rules and violated expectations by healing a man's hand on a day the authorities thought it should remain withered (Mt. 12:9-13).
- Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24).

His life, his teaching, his behaviour all caused turmoil. Palm Sunday is no exception. Today the whole city is in turmoil. Waving our palms and shouting "Hosanna" will neither hide nor relieve the turmoil. Instead, they become the symbols that shake and agitate Jerusalem disclosing its turmoil.

That turmoil is revelatory. It suggests that something about our life, our faith, our way of being is not in alignment with God's life and way of being. So much so that immediately after Jesus enters Jerusalem he goes to the temple bringing more turmoil. He drives out those who were buying and selling the way to God. He overturns the tables and chairs of those who acted as gatekeepers to God.

The turmoil of Palm Sunday points to the deeper mystery of Jesus' identity and leaves us asking, "Who is this?"

He is not sweet baby Jesus of Christmas card fame. He is not our buddy and our pal. He is not our co-pilot. He is the man of turmoil. His turmoil is life-giving and God-revealing. The turmoil he brings calls our life into alignment with God's life. His entry into Jerusalem inaugurates a Holy Week of

turmoil; realigning our relationships and teaching us the intimacy of washing feet, calling us to die before death comes, and breaking open our lives in ways we never expected or thought possible. The turmoil Jesus brings is the chaos out of which new life will be born on Easter Sunday.

Amen