

PRECIOUS CARGO
[written in oral form]

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Mark 11:1-11
Palm Sunday, Year B

March 25, 2018
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Today is both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. The two are very different in meaning and tone, and that is the tension we carry today.

Palm Sunday presents celebration and grand expectations.
The Passion is the difficult journey to the cross.
They are like contrasting colours, such as purple and yellow []
The tension rises in the awareness and choice that separates the two.

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We have already sung hymns of praise and adoration, and we've waved our palm branches to recall Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem.  
To be sure, he was humbly riding on a colt as Mark identifies his transportation. Without the excited crowd, a man riding through the gates into the city, in such a manner, would have been unremarkable.

In fact, this whole episode is a bit unique for Jesus and surprising.  
Mark gives no hint or prediction about the enthusiastic reception.

The joyous parade is in stark contrast to all of Jesus' foretelling, according to Mark. Although a surprise, there are great lessons presented in this text.

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The unusual begins with the colt.
According to Mark this colt is unbroken, and that is significant.

A colt is a male horse, not castrated, between 2 and 4 years old.
They are basically full grown.

A normal person cannot ride an unbroken colt.
Maybe that's why the owner was so agreeable about lending it out.
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Trust me on this. I use to own horses. I have helped break them, and I have been broken by them.

Yet amazingly, Jesus sat on it and rode it without apparent incident.
That feat says a lot about Jesus. He was no ordinary person.
Riding That colt was a miracle.

In addition, there is a strong statement in the presentation with the colt. A king would ride a well trained horse with flashy tack, and likely a shiny breast plate.

The colt's adornment was a saddle of cloaks from others, and that's it.

This was a humble presentation, YET the crowd seemed to ignore that message. They surrounded Jesus, praising him and saying,

"Blessed is the one who comes from Our God!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"

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With great rejoicing and anticipation, the crowd was acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah. They believed "their" Messiah to be political deliverer and a saviour to all that ails them. He would be "their" king who would reclaim David's throne--all would be great.

Fascinating: Jesus wasn't projecting that message, nor did he claim that role. Yet, none the less, the people around Jesus projected that expectation and hope on him. They ignored who he really was.

It's unfortunate how we can be blinded by our aspirations and desires.

It is noteworthy how grand characteristics are projected on our leaders. Most people want to admire, even worship their leaders.

And, power-hungry leaders will hone and polish their image to feed those expectations.

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Of course, Donald Trump comes to mind....because he certainly knows how to play to his base. Many of Trump's admirers claim to be Christians, and they ignore his negative attributes, including his unfaithfulness.

It seems, they are desperately hoping that he will deliver their needs and aspirations, and that Trump will DO God's work and make America as they wish it would be.

Those who empower tyrants tend to think that "their" despot will serve their own desires. It rarely turns out that way.

Moreover, a democracy is based on dynamic relationships and trust, and NOT on strong leaders. Beware anytime the suggestion of "strong", as in authoritative, leadership is presented.

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The majority of people who find Trump appalling are no different. He simply doesn't model their concept of a desired leader.

Those protestors will frequently grieve and moan for the reign of Obama. Obama also grabbed more power for the presidency for his agenda.

I think, most all of us are missing the error / the flawed premise.

For ex., there is an enormous obsession with trying to find the cause for Trumps election. Many find it easy to blame the Russians.

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All those looking for excuses are refusing to accept responsibility for being in a broken democratic society.

The error/ the flawed premise: ?

Why do we want a leader to solve our problems?
Why are projecting OUR idealized Messiah on a leader?
Why do we want someone to save us?
Why is there such polarization?
Why don't we understand "Those" people?
Why are we right and they are wrong?
Why is the relationship broken? What is missing?

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2,000 years ago, it didn't take long for the crowd to realize that Jesus was NOT their hoped for Messiah. So, they rejected him and turned on him.

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I suppose Jesus could have crafted his persona to meet the people's expectations. If he could ride an unbroken colt, he surely could have altered his presentation.

He could have controlled media access, and dismiss all reports that he disliked.

He could have dressed up like a king, and riding a fancy stallion would have been a good touch, too.

The crowds would have eaten that stuff up, and granted him more devotion and their submission. Perhaps, Jesus could have made all of Judea a Christian nation.

But, Jesus didn't engage in that hype or image control.

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It's interesting how many people still want to dress him up and cultivate an idealised icon Jesus.

Most pictures we have of Jesus present a strong, wavy haired, fair skinned man. There is an effort to remove the Caucasian overlay.

Still, I've seen paintings that show Jesus as a hammer swinging, muscle flexing carpenter. We don't know if he was a carpenter. If he was, would there not have been at least once citation to his carpentry skill? Or, maybe he was a lousy carpenter.....or not one at all?

In fact, we don't know what Jesus looked like.

Maybe the absence of a description of his physical appearance is a sign that his appearance didn't matter. His public image didn't matter.

Who knows,.... Jesus could have been short and bald?

I don't think he was an extrovert, but maybe that's my projection. ???

Still, he wasn't seeking an after-parade party.

Mark states that after entering Jerusalem, he looked around at the temple, and left with his 12 disciples. He left Jerusalem.

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Jesus did return to the city because he had a mission. Jesus was carrying a message for all to witness and hear.

Jesus was carrying a precious cargo--the message.

He wasn't the cargo on a colt, but rather he was the delivery man.

Jesus' cargo was God message for all humanity. It is a love message of justice, peace and grace that brings healing and atonement.

Jesus always pointed to God. It was always about God.  
His life and mission was Not about himself.  
Jesus always directed worship and faithfulness to God.  
He didn't tell people to pray to him.  
We pray to, we worship and serve God.  
That is what Jesus taught and modelled.

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YES, we claim to be followers of Jesus because we take on his message. We do Not worship a messiah.

It's not the person; it is God's message through Jesus. It was God in Jesus teaching and showing us how to live, how to be healed and bring healing to the world.

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It's the message, and NOT the person.  
We sometimes trip over that.

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I know a few very charismatic pastors, and they tend to have large devoted "followers" I mean.... members in their churches.

People like to admire their leaders, and leaders often oblige by taking care/ nurturing their image.

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Fortunately,.....or unfortunately,.... I wasn't blessed with charismatic charm. I know that I'm not a real warm fuzzy person, and since I'm an introvert, I'm not much at working a crowd, either.

Those attributes hurt my image, but maybe that's okay.

Maybe that's a blessing.....because it's not about the person; it's the message. It's the Gospel message.

The most encouraging comment I can hear is, "I appreciated the message today"....because that means I was faithful to the text.

To that comment, I usually reply, "it's in the Bible."

It's not me.

The message is what matters.

Nevertheless,.....it probably wouldn't hurt if I worked on my public persona some.

So, next Sunday being Easter, I plan to wear a suite and smile a lot.

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The point is: be careful about looking for someone to admire.

Especially be careful about hoping a powerful leader will be a messiah--one who will execute your desires. So, vote for a MPP or MP, and not for a premier or prime minister. Be engaged, and not a subject.

And remember, Jesus disappointed a lot of people.
Jesus disappointed a lot of people.
On that thought Palm Sunday turns into Passion Sunday.

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God in and through Jesus showed us and taught us the way to live that brings healing and wholeness.  
That way / God's way is not a magic pill or a rescuing messiah.

God invites us, with God's help, to do the work of healing, and  
God invites us to receive and deliver Christ's message from God.

And, I'm sorry.....it is work.  
Restoring what is broken is not an easy task.... or journey.  
Still, we don't do it alone. God is with us all the way.

Passion Sunday prompts us to examine what is broken in our relationships.....with God, the world and  
each other.

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What will it take to end the polarity in our society? What is our part?

What will it take to end prejudice....AND self righteous arrogance?

What will it take to end fear, anger and injustice?

What is will it take to heal what is broken in our relationships?

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Healing and restoration requires endless love,.....a lot of work.....and a miracle.....  
We can call that miracle the grace of God.  
If you and I understand grace, then....  
Let us proceed into Passion week.....