

2025 04 13 – *As One Who Serves*

Scripture: Luke 19:28b-40
Luke 22:14-27 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Palm Sunday is, of course, the day that we celebrate Jesus' entrance, his procession into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples have come to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover. They are among tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims who have travelled to Jerusalem for this holy holiday. The city is full of people who have come to celebrate their ancestor's liberation from slavery in Egypt.

This large, yearly gathering of Jewish pilgrims no doubt caused concern for their Roman oppressors. It was well known that every year, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, also came to Jerusalem for Passover. He came, not as a sign of respect for his subjects' Jewish religion, but rather to be in the city in case there was trouble. Each year, he arrived at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and foot soldiers. He arrived with a show of force. He arrived with the intent of subduing the masses with fear and intimidation. (Marcus J Borg & John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week*, 2006, page 2)

Fear and intimidation are tactics that have been used throughout history and even today. We see it in the school yard. We see it in sports. We see it in corporations. And, especially today, we are seeing it in the political arena. There are those who believe that this is the appropriate way for leaders to act; that peace and prosperity are possible only with a show of force.

Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg in their book *The Last Week*, tell us that there is a good chance that these two processions arrived in Jerusalem on the same day, Jesus from the east and Pilate from the west. Jesus, of course, led a very different procession. Rather than a horse, Jesus rode a humble donkey, rather than imperial banners, his followers waved palm branches, rather than standing back in fear and awe, his crowd came forward to lay their cloaks on the ground ahead of him. And they shouted,

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God!

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!

With his entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus was making a clear statement that he was a different kind of leader, a different kind of king. The Roman Emperor, claimed to be the son of the Roman God, Apollo. Jesus' connection was, of course, to the God of the Jews, to YHWH, the God that Jesus referred to as "Abba" or daddy. The Roman Emperor kept the peace with force, Jesus lived and preached a peace that came without war or any kind of violence. He proclaimed God's reign born of justice. Jesus lived a humble, servant life of healing, teaching and preaching.

Palm Sunday is, of course, the beginning of Holy Week. This is a week where we remember the events of the last few days of Jesus' life. Each Gospel tells the story a little differently, including different events and different sayings. But the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all include, very clearly, the story of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. It is during this supper that Jesus serves the bread and the cup, a ritual that we now call communion.

It is also during this supper, that Jesus again states clearly just what kind of king, just what kind of a leader, just what kind of person he is. It happens after the sharing of the bread and the cup. The disciples begin to argue about who should be regarded as the greatest among them. In response Jesus says,

Earthly rulers domineer over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called their “benefactors.” This must not happen to you. Let the greatest among you be like the youngest. Let the leader among you become the follower. For who is greater? The one who reclines at a meal, or the one who serves it? Isn’t it the one reclining at the table? Yet here I am among you, as the one who serves you.

Jesus, the servant King, the servant leader. He demonstrates who he is, not only through his humble entrance to Jerusalem, but also here in this last meal with his disciples. By serving the bread and cup he is displaying his kind of leadership. But this time, Jesus is also directing his disciples to do the same. He is telling them that they are not to intimidate, or “lord it over” those who follow them, but rather to be humble and to serve. He says, “let the leader among you become the follower...here I am among you, as the one who serves you.”

I remember as a child that my father was a part of the AOTS, a men’s organization within the United Church. At the time, I had no idea what the initials stood for and I certainly didn’t know what bible verse they came from. “As One That Serves,” what a great name for an organization and now it is clear that it comes from the words of Jesus.

Is there anyone one here who was a member of the AOTS? How many of you have fathers, or husbands, or brothers or uncles who were members? The national executive of the AOTS no longer exists, but there are still some AOTS groups living and working in our churches. Their mission includes the following four goals:

- To be an arm of the Church reaching out in Christian Fellowship to all men.
- To deepen the spiritual life of men.
- To encourage and promote effective Christian Service.
- To give encouragement and practical assistance to work among the youth of the church and community.

<https://www.aots.ca/>

Even though this organization has dwindled, their goal to encourage and promote effective Christian Service is still alive and well here at First United Church.

Whenever we follow the guidance of our own mission statement “to be an open and diverse community of faith,” whenever we “pursue the values of spiritual growth, compassionate outreach, social justice and care of the earth,” we are serving both our church and our community. True leadership and power come not from fear or intimidation, but from service, from leadership based on humility and lived in love.

May we all follow the example of Jesus, our teacher and guide, and live “as one who serves.” May it be so. Amen.