

**“Laser Line of Sight”**  
**Matthew 21:1-11**  
**Palm Sunday-April 5, 2020**

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: “Go over to the village across from you. You’ll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you’re doing, say, ‘The Master needs them!’ He will send them with you.”

This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:

Tell Zion’s daughter,  
“Look, your king’s on his way,  
poised and ready, mounted  
On a donkey, on a colt,  
foal of a pack animal.”

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David’s son!” “Blessed is he who comes in God’s name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!”

As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, “What’s going on here? Who is this?”

The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”

As if we didn’t have enough disruptions in our lives these days, we now have to use a password to unlock the link to our Zoom worship. Some unscrupulous and troubled characters are Zoombombing (there’s a new word for you) worship services and meetings with profanity, advertising, and photos not wanted nor invited. In response to these unwanted intrusions, Zoom yesterday morning started requiring passwords for every gathering on its site.

This just doesn't seem right that we now have to have a password to enter into our virtual churches! I picture Jesus riding in through the outer gates of Jerusalem, bound and determined to open the kingdom of God to *everyone*. In his laser line of sight were the scribes and Pharisees, religious leaders that would jealously guard the Word and blessing of God for just a select few, those with the magic password that would demonstrate their ritual cleanliness and give them holy permission to enter the outer areas of the Temple. No password, no entry.

Jesus sees this as a disgrace. As he enters Jerusalem for the last time, he flings wide the gates of elitism and cultural oppression, proclaiming God's unconditional love for all people. He turns over tables in the Temple courtyard, walks among the lepers in defiance of the purity codes, heals sick persons, raises dead persons, dines with prostitutes and thieves, and welcomes women into his inner circle of followers. Password-smassword, he is for none of it.

Rev. Sue Artt, our Rocky Mountain Conference Minister, gave me the idea for this message today. She said in these days of Covid-19 ministry, we should set aside all the "shoulds and ought-tos" of our normal vocational life and focus our laser light on that which is most important and immediate. All other things can wait. All other projects, initiatives and plans will have their day again, but for right now, *right now*, we need to be about that which is most basic in our lives and in the life of our churches and other ministry settings.

I say, thank you for this reminder, and thanks to all of you who have offered to help and reminded me to practice self-care. Right now, the UCCPH laser light is focused on two interrelated importances: meaningful worship and pastoral care.

We have a team of folks who have really come together to create quality, relevant, inspiring worship. They don't particularly like to be thanked publicly so I won't name them but know that we have a highly competent and dedicated team working to bring you the most hopeful, joyful and community-binding experience each week that we can. Feel free to send me photographs and videos of yours, poems, and short writings or stories that we can use in our online services. Your creativity will bolster our growing library of worship resources.

We also have a team of people helping me stay connected to you in relational ways. You have likely received either a call or a card from a member of our Care & Nurture Team or other church partners helping out with spiritual and emotional care. Please let Martha Sprague know if you need personal pastoral care from me.

Starting this week, in addition to the Monday Evening Open Zoom Chat, I will host weekly "virtual office hours" where you can make an appointment with me for a private chat.

I am handing off most other things to the lay leadership of the church. My laser line of sight has narrowed, but my enthusiasm for our church WHY has not! We proclaim the unconditional love of God, because we follow Jesus and the Good News he brought and brings to people everywhere.

At a certain time in his life, he lets the mundane tasks of his ministry go. He has laser sharp focus as he rides into the holy city of his people, and nothing will deter him. Though his words are unpopular with those in authority and power, he still speaks his truth. Though his acts of mercy are scoffed at by people who stand apart, he still dirties his hands with the people who need him most. Though his love is rejected by the religious leaders of his own faith,

he still leads with that love and spreads it all around, especially in those places where love has been forgotten.

Where is your laser light pointing these days? As we start Holy Week with Palm Sunday, this would be a good day for you to spend some quiet meditation time. Following a little quiet time, you might write two or three things that are most important for you to concentrate on and apply your energies to in this time of quarantine. Feel free to share them with your loved ones or me if it will help you be accountable. How will you live out our church WHY in the coming weeks? How will you demonstrate the unconditional love of God in your words, in your deeds, and in how you spread the love of Christ around?

I invite you to let your anxious mind take a breather-your worried brain has been working overtime!

I invite you to let your self-judgment take a holiday and give yourself a small measure of the grace you so freely give to others.

Bake something; share and eat it without guilt.

Read a novel that has off-put you in the past because it has too many pages.

Start writing your memoir, plant your garden, walk your dog or just your soul. Organize your closet, read to your children, work a jigsaw puzzle or sew a quilt. Send postcards to your friends-in the mail. Pray daily, not for God to stop the virus, for that won't happen, but for God to be known to people suffering because of it. Healthcare workers and first-responders, teachers using online learning for the first time and first-time home schoolers when weeks ago parents were parents and teachers were teachers. Civic leaders trying to apportion minimal supplies and suppliers feeling the pressure to literally protect and save the world. People who are hooked up to machines

and dying alone, as well as those who grieve deeply that they are separated from their dying loved ones. You have your own lists I am sure.

Let your laser light shine where it is most needed. Let the rest go. Be Jesus in Jerusalem—focused, dedicated, undeterred by either people or nature. I'll leave you today with a poem by Wendell Berry, "The Place of Wild Things:"

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief.  
I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
Waiting with their light.  
For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

*May It Be So.*

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