**“Disruptive Honesty”**

**Palm Sunday**

Matthew 21:1-11, 28-32

April 9, 2017, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

Today is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is the name the church has traditionally given to the Sunday before Easter. It was on this Sunday that Jesus entered Jerusalem and was welcomed as a king. Unfortunately all this will change in just a few short days and by the end of the week He will be betrayed, arrested, tried, scourged, crucified, dead and buried.

Now it always seems to me that the great question of this day is what happened? How do we get from the adoring crowds welcoming Jesus as king today, to the screaming mob calling for His head a few days later? Let me start with a couple of facts about Palm Sunday, and then we’ll try to understand what happened between today and the end of the week.

Today, Palm Sunday, Jesus is welcomed as both king and Messiah. How do we know this? One reason we know this is because of the Palm branches. About 200 years earlier a Jewish leader named Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt that over threw the pagan rulers of Israel. When he marched victoriously into Jerusalem a crowd welcomed him by waving palm branches. The crowd that welcomed Jesus on that Sunday saw the same thing in Jesus, and they were hoping that He would do the same thing to the Romans who ruled them at the time.

Another sign of kingship comes from the cloaks they spread on the ground before Him. Matthew says that in addition to the palm branches they “spread their cloaks on the road.” (Matthew 21:8). This goes back to the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, chapter 9. The great prophet Elisha sends someone to anoint Jehu king of Israel. He’s actually instructed to pour the oil on Jehu’s head in secret and then run like the dickens. So he does as he is told; he anoints Jehu king in a room, out of sight. However, the moment Jehu comes out, his fellow soldiers realize what has happened, and they *spread their cloaks at his feet*. The crowd on Palm Sunday knew what they were doing.

And if we need any more evidence we have only to look at what they shout. “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Hosanna can be translated “Save we beseech thee!” or “O save,” or “Save now.” You get the idea. But it’s not just “Hosanna,” its “Hosanna *to the Son of David*,” which is to say “Hosanna to the Messiah!”

Here’s my summary. Everything that is going on at this moment would lead any observer to assume that everyone is on Jesus’ side, that they are ready and willing to do whatever it takes to help Him to accomplish His purpose which they expect is the overthrow of Rome. So how did everything go so wrong so quickly?

Perhaps you’ve wondered the same thing. And if you accepted the invitation I gave a couple weeks ago and read a Gospel or two you have already been presented with the answer to the question, although you might not have seen it. Here’s it is. Virtually everything that takes place between now and the end of the week, every conversation, every encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem, ends in a confrontation. Come and see.

It starts with what Jesus does next. The moment He gets down off the donkey He goes into the Temple and turns over the tables of the moneychangers and those selling doves and such for the sacrifices. That’s the first thing He does. I’m surprised they didn’t do Him in right then. And it only gets worse. In Matthew 23 Jesus devotes an entire lecture to describing the teachers of the law and the Pharisees as hypocrites. He calls them “blind guides” who are full of “wickedness.” Listen to verse 15. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.” (Matthew 23:15) Rule #1: If you want to make friends and influence people don’t call them a “child of hell.”

And then look at the second passage I’ve chosen for today. Jesus tells a parable about two boys. Their daddy asks them both to go work in the vineyard. Now we need to remember that in the Old Testament, a vineyard is a frequent image for the nation of Israel, especially in the prophets. The first boy refuses to go and then he does. The second boy agrees to go and then he doesn’t. So, Jesus asks, who did what his daddy wanted? I can almost see some Pharisee raising his hand excitedly, ‘I know! I know!’ Call on me! Call on me!’ The first boy they all say. Great! They have answered correctly. Maybe Jesus will have something nice to say about them. But, no, He wants them to know that in God’s eyes they are the second son, the one who said he’d go and then didn’t. And so He says, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.” (Matthew 21:31-32)

So imagine this. You are a devout believer. You believe, actually you know, you are doing what God wants you to do. And along comes Jesus who tells you that the tax collectors and prostitutes, two groups of people you despise, two groups of people you know are not following God, are actually closer to God than you are? Who wouldn’t want to do Him in!

Can you see it? Can you see now how the shouts of welcome on Sunday turned into the cries of “Crucify Him!” on Friday? Jesus is relentless.

Let me add something personal to what I’ve said thus far. This is actually one of the main reasons I love Jesus. I love this side of my Lord. I love this side of His personality. I love the fact that I can trust Jesus to tell me the truth about who I am and how I am living *no matter what.* I love knowing He is not going to hold back, or soft peddle the truth when I am heading down the wrong path, or tolerating something in my life that’s hurting me or holding me back.

A couple years ago a number of you studied a book by John Eldredge titled *Beautiful Outlaw.* One of the chapters in the book is titled “Disruptive Honesty.” That’s what we are talking about here. Let me share with you a few excerpts from this chapter.

Do you know what an “intervention” is? An intervention is a meeting that brings together a group of loving friends and family to try to help someone who is caught in some addiction or other illness to admit they have a problem and consent to get help. This is one of the surprising images John Eldredge uses in the book to describe the work of Jesus. He compares Jesus’ three years of public ministry to “one long intervention.” “He is on a mission to rescue a people who are so utterly deceived most of them don’t want to be rescued.” (68) A little later he says something similar. “The world is stone drunk, and raging at Jesus because He’s trying to keep us from taking the car.” (79)

We love to remember Jesus for His kindness and His compassion, and certainly He was kind and compassionate in absolutely remarkable ways. But isn’t it also kind and compassionate to tell someone a truth they may not want to hear, but need to?

John Eldredge writes, “You can count on Jesus to tell you the truth in the best possible way for you to hear it.”(71) I love this side of Jesus. In fact, I’m don’t think it would be wise to follow Him if we couldn’t trust Him to do this.

So, does this side of Jesus surprise you? Do you think He might have something to say to you too?

I know this can feel risky, or threatening, but here’s my invitation for Holy Week. What if we all *intentionally* invited Jesus to speak His truth into our normal interactions with other people and our regular thoughts and feelings? Is there a truth we need to hear but may not want to hear? Of course there is. Tell Him you want to know what it is; you want to see it, feel it, no matter what it is. Don’t push Him away like the religious authorities and the crowds did so long ago.

“You can count on Jesus to tell you the truth in the best possible way for you to hear it.” Are you willing to ask?

Let’s pray…