

“Unbridled Grace” Luke 19:28-40  
1, 2007

Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore  
San Dimas Community Church, UCC

April

I want to begin by saying that today’s sermon is inspired by the book, The Last Week, by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, who have spent their lives both studying Jesus and being committed to his message.

One spring day about 30 AD two processions entered the city of Jerusalem. One was a peasant processional. The other was a imperial one. The peasant processional was led by Jesus, himself a peasant, and as he rode on a colt, he was cheered by those devoted to him, and they honored him by laying down their cloaks to form a path. The imperial procession was led by Pontiffs Pilate, riding in splendor and followed by a military show of force intended to make a point. Of course, Pilate didn’t want to be in Jerusalem; he preferred to rule from his seaside resort of Caesurae on the Sea; but whenever there was a Jewish holiday, especially Passover when 200,000 Jews infiltrated the Holy City, Pilate had no choice but to parade his power and squash any thought of a Jewish uprising.

The other processional is led by Jesus, humbling riding a colt. From the west rides Pilate, showing the force of the Roman empire; from the east comes Jesus. They are on a collision course that will unfold in the next week. They meet in Jerusalem, both the city of God and the location of brutal domination of 90% of the Jews who barely survive day in and day out. And in Jerusalem there was a third force to reckon with: the high priest and his entourage who ran the temple. They were wealthy Jews who kept their wealth and position by servicing the Romans. They collected the Roman taxes (as well as taxes for their own pockets); they maintained order by evoking the name of God to justify their practices. They used the excuse, “God told us to do it this way.”

Three forces met in Jerusalem: the overpaid priest in cahoots with the Romans’ military machine, and Jesus, an itinerant, peasant preacher who dares to model himself after Israel’s kings. Like King David he rides down the Mount of Olives to the cheers of a crowd of peasants. Did he mean to do this? Did he mean this to look like a counter political and religious demonstration?

If Jesus is acting like a king, the gospels say he’s not like the kings the people are used to. Jesus is a king like the prophet Zechariah says: “will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations.” *This king, riding on a donkey, will banish war from the land--no more chariots, war-horses, or bows. Commanding peace to the nations, he will be a king of peace.* (p.4)

We could jump ahead (because we know how the story ends), but let’s stay in the present, on Palm Sunday, and ponder this scene. I wonder if Jesus knows that these followers of his are in for a surprise. They don’t yet understand just what kind of king he is. Yea, yea, he’s the Messiah foretold; but surely this Messiah will not only save their souls but also their bodies. Surely, this king won’t allow things to continue the way they are. They’ve suffered long enough. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord to rescue them from their suffering! Yet, Jesus doesn’t condemn these followers who go with him to Jerusalem.

He seems willing to let the days play out and to offer even these misguided souls a tremendous measure of grace, uncontrolled grace, unrestrained grace, unbridled grace.

The reason I titled this sermon “Unbridled Grace” is because at Bible study a couple of weeks ago we got into a rather lengthy discussion about the animal Jesus rode that day. My friend, Sue, who knows a lot about horses, was flabbergasted at the implication that anyone could ride a colt, a baby horse, a horse that had never been ridden, was not old enough to put a blanket on much less a man, and a horse that had never been bridled. In her words, “It’s a miracle!”

Now let’s talk about the second word of my title: “grace.” What I think is a miracle is the grace we see in Jesus as Holy Week unfolds, and the grace we are gifted with as we commit our lives to be part of God’s dream revealed in the life of Jesus.

All the time I see people who need to feel grace. I feel it is more acute at the present time perhaps because we live in a world in turmoil; we feel a turmoil in our souls as well. It took me way too long to know grace. I clearly remember being 22 years old, standing in front of a mirror, and thinking how much I disliked myself. And I also remember thinking, that before I had children, I would have to learn to love myself so that they would have a healthy self love for themselves.

I have noticed that within our community of faith a lot of folks are way too hard on themselves. Not only is denying God’s grace rather pretentious on our part, but the grace we allow ourselves to accept is proportionate to the grace we are able to extend to others. We all screw up. We are like those misguided, kind of stupid folks who thought Jesus was winning for us the lottery. But in spite of ourselves, Jesus saves us because his heart, like the heart of God, has unbridled grace that cannot be controlled and will sooner or later touch us and free us so that we can touch and free and bless others. One insightful young person I was talking with this week said that grace is kind of “divinely inspired benefit of the doubt.”

Yes, the Christian life is demanding; it is not trivial; it is not to be taken lightly. And as we journey through Holy Week we are confronted with the question of which procession we’ll be part of: Will we play it “safe” and join the procession of power that forces our will through fear and might? Or, will we join the procession that ushers in the true kingdom of God, the power of God’s reign of peace and well-being for all creation? Which procession do we want to be in?

Folks, the good news for us is that the one who led the procession from the East that day, led a grace filled life and his grace still lives, and it is God’s gift to us. We may be naive, misguided, mistaken, even a little stupid; we may even need to change our ways or change our thinking, but the point is we have joined the parade. We don’t have to be perfect; we just need to keep walking. And so we rejoice and sing “hosannas” because we are led by the One who comes in the name of the Lord, the One who comes with unbridled grace, the One who promises to go with us all the way.