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 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
 March 24, 2013
 Passion/Palm Sunday

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40
 "A Joyful Glimpse"

Some of you might remember that the cover quote by Laura Gale was on last year's bulletin cover on this day. She writes: "Palm Sunday is like a glimpse of Easter. It's a little bit joyful after being somber during Lent."

I was somber in my two Lenten sermons this year. One dealt with a convicted killer in the Texas penal system and his cavalier approach to his crime which deprived him and the world release and liberation; and last week I suggested that each of us has some Judas ingredient in the complex mix of our lives.

In both instances I concluded my sermon with, "and so, we move closer to the cross and resurrection."

Two Lenten sermons were out of my hands: one was preached by Ian on one Sunday and the other by Suellen and women of the church on "Celebrating the Gifts of Women" Sunday. The third was my sermon on Jesus and the Oscars which contained some aspects of Lent.

The liturgy during Lent included the Lenten themes so hopefully we felt some somberness. It's a somber thing to contemplate the many ways humanity conspires to nail Jesus to the cross.

Palm Sunday is that little in-between time as Gale says between the Sundays of Lent and Good Friday which is this Friday, although this day is called "Passion/Palm Sunday.". We add "passion" to this day of palms because some people may not be able to attend Friday's service and are encouraged in today's service to experience some crucifixion so we not jump from the joy of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter.

The premise is that the road to the life of Easter goes through the death of Good Friday. Good Friday helps us and all humanity to put to death those things in ourselves and society that contribute to Jesus's death so we too might rise to newness of life with Jesus.

The Good Friday worship service provides excellent liturgy to help us in this process. We face Jesus' death head-on on Good Friday so I hope you all can come to the service at 7:00 pm. If you cannot make it please read and pray yourself into the gospel stories of the crucifixion some time during the week or on the day. In this way you will truly enjoy the flowering of the cross and message of Easter next Sunday. Go to the darkness of Gethsemane and Golgotha and you will see the glorious light of Easter.

Back to Gale's beautiful quote: "Palm Sunday is like a glimpse of Easter. It's a little bit joyful after being somber during Lent." Let us enjoy some of this joy through the Palm Sunday reading today and brief sermon to follow.

Hear the word of God as read in Luke 19:28-40.

...Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it."

Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

This joyful passage is the famous story of Jesus entering Jerusalem in fulfillment of an Old Testament story. From this account we should call this day "Cloak Sunday" because the people threw their cloaks under the donkey's feet. In the Gospel according to John it is palms – waved by the people and placed on the road.

The Lukan story follows the plot of Zechariah 9:9 where Israel's king comes to Jerusalem triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey. The disciples' acclamation comes from Psalm 118:26: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Lord," to which Luke adds an explicit reference to Jesus as king.

Luke also adds a comment about peace and glory. The praise of the multitude of angels at the beginning of Luke's gospel is about peace on earth, and in fact Jesus bestows peace on earth throughout his ministry. Further, the plot of Zechariah 9, which is so strongly played out in Jesus' entry, anticipates God's acts to establish peace for Jerusalem.

In today's reading, Luke locates peace in heaven. Jesus' disciples acclaim him king and celebrate his entrance into the city that in their tradition was the point of contact between heaven and earth. If peace in heaven then peace on earth.

The disciples call out to the one they regard as king of Israel who will establish God's reign of peace in Roman-occupied Jerusalem and Israel. No wonder the Pharisees, who don't want to

rock the boat and incur Roman wrath, ask Jesus to hush his disciples. Jesus replies enigmatically and beautifully: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Peace for Jesus is liberation for the hurting and oppressed on earth whether personal (depression, loneliness, rejection, poor self-esteem, you name it) or societal (poverty, discrimination, bias, violence, war, environmental damage and destruction, again you name it), or aspects of both which is generally the case.

I tried to think of a literal "the stones would shout out" analogy. Besides that given in my time with the younger church, I have it in my hand. This stone was given me by a German pastor. It's a piece of the Berlin wall.

I make no politically preferential statement here with regards to the U.S. President at the time of the fall of the Berlin wall. Reagan was the lucky President to be in the Oval Office at the time, although he did his fair share to tear down the wall.

People struggled for years to free Germany and open the east/west divide demarcated by this separation wall. In effect, they worked for the realm of God on earth and even when they were silent the stones of the wall shouted out. They shouted louder when the wall came down and now this stone shouts as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. These are the walls that many believe should not be erected.

This stone also brings into question the separation wall in Israel today. It is said that Mary and Joseph could not travel today from Nazareth to Bethlehem as easily as they did 2,000 years ago. They'd be blocked by the wall. Suellen and I rode on public transport from Jerusalem to Bethlehem 35 years ago. It was an easy ride on a bus packed with Arabs and Jews and goats through rugged and hilly biblical countryside. Today a wall would stop us from getting through.

We know the complicated story behind the wall. We know that Israel claims to feel safer with the wall and we also know that it has created many problems for Palestinians. God so longs for peace in Israel/Palestine. There is minimal joy there today. This reflects Christ's passion.

We'll leave it there and return to the joy of this day for God knows we need as much joy as we can get in an otherwise somber world.

So, along with the multitudes in today's gospel story, we praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen in Jesus, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Whenever we see goodness in the earth we joyfully praise God. Goodness shouts out.

When we see fresh, clean waterways because groups of people advocate and work to keep them clean we joyfully praise God. The water shouts out.

When we sing our praises today and listen to the good music and say our prayers and listen to God's word we joyfully praise God. Our sanctuary shouts out.

When lives are changed because they affirm Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and when they/we follow Jesus' way of wholeness and healing, we joyfully praise God. The stones shout out!

When people clean up beaches we joyfully praise God. The sand shouts out.

When they clean bays and seas dirtied by oil spills we joyfully praise God. Fish and sea life shout out.

When we experience peace, beauty, harmony, compassion, justice, and the like we joyfully praise God and everything shouts out.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem and the people joyfully praise God. Gag the people and all creation shouts: stones, water, sanctuary, sand, seas, sea life, trees, bays, mountains, everything!

In the brief joy of this day we do indeed glimpse Easter. Amen.