

“Restless for Peace” Luke 19:26-48
Rev. Michele Ward Palm Sunday Year A April 2, 2023
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore MD

GOSPEL READING Luke 19:29-48 (NRSVUE)

Today’s readings come from the Gospel of Luke.
Listen now for a Word from God.

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. Now as he was 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.”

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

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Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, and he said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, and could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

All: Thanks be to God.

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FRAME

This morning, we will bring the story of Palm Sunday to life through story, song, and reflection together. I will retell the Triumphal Entry from the perspective of Jesus. Our text this morning takes us through multiple scenes: the disciples and the colt, the crowd on the road, Jesus weeping at the edge of Jerusalem, the clearing out of the temple, and Jesus staying there to teach. A song by Sweet Honey in the Rock, called “Ella’s Song,” will play for 1 minute intervals between scenes. For this sermon, you will need a pen and a blank page in your bulletin.

I want you to write down the question: What makes you restless for peace? During the musical interludes, we will take time to write down our thoughts about this question. There are no right answers. This time is for you and for God. Let’s begin.

PRAYER

I am walking into town with my friends, near Bethphage, near Bethany. We end at this place called the Mount of Olives. I tell two of them, “Go into that town right there. When you get there, you will find a colt tied up. This colt will be unbroken, unrideable. Untie it and bring it back. Yeah - I want you to steal it. And if anyone asks you why you’re stealing it, just tell them, “The Lord needs it.” No one will ask you any questions.

They looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and headed into town. Just like I told them, a colt was there, tied up.

It took them a little while, but the disciples eventually made it back. When they arrived, they looked out of breath and a little shook. I mean, I had asked them to take off with stolen property without getting caught.

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No such luck. They told us, “We walked right up to the colt, and untied him. The owners heard the commotion outside, and came out, yelling, “Why are you untying our colt?!” We did what Jesus said, and told the baffled owners, “The Lord needs it.” They scoffed and chased us! It was awful!”

Even though the colt was stubborn and unruly, I managed to get on his back. It took the two disciples who found him standing on either side and me on his back to keep him from bucking me off and running away. We did not have a saddle, so some of the disciples lent me their cloaks to put on the colt’s back. Eventually, he settled down, and we began to make it down the Mount of Olives Jerusalem.

What makes you restless for peace?

[SONG - 60 SECONDS]

People saw us coming from far away, and began crowding around the sides of the road. They put their cloaks down on the road for us. The crowds still weren’t sure what to say, but they stood, watching the spectacle, asking each other, “Who is this man? Who are these people with him?” The disciples started to shout about the miracles I’d performed, like the healing of the blind, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and shouting, “Blessed is the king who comes in God’s name! Peace and glory in heaven!” Some of the religious leaders who were talking and watching in the crowds came up to me on the colt.

They tried to stop our procession, telling me, “You need to make your disciples stop shouting and making such a ruckus. They are stirring people up right before Passover, and we will draw Pilate’s attention.” I looked at them and said, “If I tried to make them stop, the stones on this road would start to shout. I cannot and will not make them stop.”

The religious leaders could not believe that I would talk to them like this. I saw the fear in their eyes. I know what disturbing the peace

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means for us as colonized people. I know that Pontius Pilate was in town to make sure that we stay in our place. He brought a full military posse with him to intimidate the Jewish people from around the empire traveling during Passover. The religious leaders wanted nothing to do with us. They were afraid whatever attention we drew to ourselves would lead to trouble for them, too. They stood there alongside the road as our procession went by. Some of the people who had been on the sidelines joined in now, shouting and praising God about the miracles they’d seen.

What makes you restless for peace?

[SONG - 60 SECONDS]

I could see Jerusalem now, the temple glittering in the sun. I started to cry uncontrollably. I couldn’t help it. All I could think about was all of the people in the city, and I was filled with love for them. Then I prophesied over the city, something I never wish upon anyone.

Through my tears I said to Jerusalem, “If only you’d been paying attention to how to make peace. But now, you can’t see it. Someday, your enemies will set up for war against you. They will surround you, they will block you on every side of the city walls. They will destroy you and your children. They won’t leave any part of the city standing because you did not pay attention.”

I felt so tired. I was exhausted from traveling all over the region healing and teaching. I was weary from telling people the same things over and over again and hearing the same questions over and over again.

What makes you restless for peace?

[SONG - 60 SECONDS]

I kept thinking about the city as I rode through Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives to the Temple gates. I saw Roman soldiers on foot

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patrol and on horseback. I saw their weapons. I felt angry that as my people were preparing for some of their holiest days, the Roman empire was policing us even heavier than usual.

When I finally arrived at the Outer Courts of the Temple, I saw merchants selling animals of all kinds for sacrifice, I saw money exchange tables, and I lost it. My disciples and I forced them out. I knocked over their tables, scared away the livestock and birds, and scattered the coins all over the courtyard. I shouted, “It is written, “My house is for praying, but you have made it a hangout for thieves!”

No one could keep me out, though, even though they tried. I stayed at the temple, teaching every day and having a sit-in. Everyone stayed to listen and none of the temple leaders could force me out.

What makes you restless for peace?

[SONG - 60 SECONDS]

I am restless for peace. I am tired of talking about guns. I am tired of talking about gun control. I am tired of the NRA with politicians in their pockets. The Columbine shooting took place when I was 10 years old. 10 years old.

24 years later, 12 children die from gun violence in America every single day.¹ 12 children a day. 12 children a day. And what has changed? The main thing that has changed since 1999 is the increase in mass and school shootings and the lack of tangible action to stop the unnecessary deaths of children.

This week, the shooting at a Presbyterian school in Nashville dominates the media. And no action is taken to stop the next.

Jesus was tired too. He was tired of the oppression of his people. He was tired of hypocrisy. He was tired of corruption. But Jesus was

¹ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2200169>

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determined. He was determined to see his mission through to the end. He knew that he could not turn his back on the people he loved. Even while he prophesied and wept over Jerusalem, he still made his way into the city. He still taught in the temple courts. He still continued on the long road of suffering, knowing that he had a role to play in the long arc of justice.

If we are truly people who believe in peace, we will not rest. If we are determined to seek freedom from gun violence, then we will not rest. We will not rest until all children can go to school without the fear that they will be shot and killed in their classrooms. We will not rest until all parents can drop their children off without their hearts in their throats. We will not rest until children in this city can safely play in the streets. We will not rest until 12 children dying every day from gun violence is a thing of the past.

Yes, we can weep over Jerusalem. Yes, we can weep over our country. But we cannot give up. We must not give up. We keep walking.