

## Holding on, Letting Go

Jubilee Mennonite Church  
April 14, 2019

**Purpose:** To celebrate the triumphal entry as the inauguration of life giving newness by the challenging way of the cross.

**Message:** As we allow ourselves to travel with Jesus even into the depths of despair, we are reminded that even there he, and we are not, shall not be abandoned by God.

**Scripture:** Luke 19:28-40 (I will read); Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 [please read]

**Synopsis:** Our expectations are powerful. We all have them—the notions of the way life and living SHOULD be, the way power should flow, the way our histories should work out. Often we find ourselves doing heavy lifting emotionally when we have to adapt our expectations to the reality of our life and times. We can feel abandoned by God when our world turns upside down.

Yet, God reminds us in the way of Christ on the way to the Cross that there is no place that we can be that God is not. We would much rather stay with the cheering crowds and never head toward Friday, toward the challenging of our expectations of a triumphant Christ. Yet, God in faithfulness reminds us that even when our expectations fail us, God does not, but can bring all things into full flower in time.

[Streams in the Desert Ps 118 1-2 19-29 3-28-2010.doc](#)

[The way of the Cross Isaiah 50 4-9.doc](#)

[A Royal Disappointment lent 5 palm sunday Luke 19 28-40 03-24-2013.docx](#)

Luke 19: 28-40

<sup>28</sup> After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup> When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ” <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> saying,

“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!”

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup> He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Luke 19:28-40 NRS

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Does everyone have their piece of cloth for this morning. What have you been doing with it? What have people been doing to make it your own? Have you been wrapping it around your hand? Knotting it up? Folding it back and forth? Hold it in your hands for a little bit—a couple seconds and you can feel the material warming to you, to your heat. Like the endless succession of police dramas have taught us, even just grabbing it the first time, we have left bits of ourselves in the cloth with our skin cells, finger prints, and what not have been transferred from ourselves to this symbol. Has anyone done anything unique with their cloth yet? Maybe you waved it about as part of the procession. Maybe you have already begun thinking about what this might represent for you today as we again consider holding on and letting go. On whatever level, in whatever way, this cloth, this little piece of fabric has already begun to part of us in just the few minutes that we have held it.

I point this out because I want to challenge you to give it away. I would like to invite you to just stand up and trade it with someone else around you if you would. Now you don't have to if you don't want to. It is quite alright to hold onto what you have for whatever reason you wish to. But go ahead and just trade this around if you would and collect a new piece of cloth. Go ahead and do it now.

I am curious, how many of you held on to the cloth that you had at first? There is no shame in it. Just hold up your hands. How many of you needed to think a little bit before you traded your cloth, or went ahead and did so with some level of regret, even if just in passing? How many of you would really like yours back, even if you went ahead and traded? It's amazing, isn't it? A little, pretty insignificant piece of fabric which is not of much real value and has only been ours for about half an hour, yet we can already name it as ours and hesitate to part with it. It may be with good reason, or just that we have already used it as a handkerchief (which is indeed a good reason in itself), but for whatever the reason, we tend to be hesitant to let go of what is ours even if it is relatively trivial.

Palm Sunday is challenging. It speaks well to how things are, and how we are. It promises much. It is not just any Sunday that we parade about declaring the coming of the kingdom of God and proclaiming glory. It's a day of celebration. It's a day of expectation as we join those first crowds in expressing their expectational hope: a hope for freedom, an expectation of change, perhaps there was even a little bit of revolution in the air as Jesus

proclaims the unstoppable reality of the acclimation: If they are silent, even the rocks and the hills will cry out. We who know the whole story, who understand what is about to be and what is about to happen know exactly how quickly and completely those expectations will change from elation to disappointment. It turns out that today is also a day that teaches us a lot about letting go too.

Much like our mindless cloth this morning, we will have to let go of our expectations and the desires, and adapt to a world that looks startlingly different from that which the crowds were hoping, anticipating, just like the crowd that accompanies Jesus into the city. When we hail the coming of the King, we are more than likely to turn Jesus into the savior we are looking for. We like it that way. Regardless of our tradition and our theology, we want the Jesus that we want, no matter what century we find ourselves in. Most of the time, that is a politically stable, strong, militant Christ who holds opinions a lot like ours, and makes judgements that we would see as fair, right and proper. Yes even we Anabaptists.

Because it is what we deep down hope we will get. We like to be right. We want to win. We want our God to be strong. We have draped the gospel with our own xenophobia, given him our own weapons, judgements, and opinions, adorned him with our own way of seeing the world. We make a mash of Christ, combining that which is in the reality of God with the reality that we wish God was in, the world of our expectations and our hopes. It is hard read the Jesus of the bible and not end up hoping that somehow he might be what want, what we expect, instead of the world ending, life changing power of the living God who would come and challenge even that which we hold dear that is not of the Kingdom. Jesus does this time and again as he is on his way to the cross, and he does this all the way through to the cross—he refuses to define the reign of God, his reign in the terms that the world as we know could deal with, understand and know what to do with. Perhaps if he had, he might not have to die. Yet he does because he was willing to let go of the expectations of his world, our world, and take full ownership of God's way, even though it means facing what appears to be the end.

The trouble with a mash-up Christ is that it is so hard to distinguish the primary story from that which we have concocted to suit our own imaginations. Our imaginations are all too often filled with polarity to ever full grasp Jesus completely. We limit love severely, God's love most of all. We are constantly being invited to live our lives in the polarities of the world;

conservative and liberal (small letters), war-maker versus dove, gun owner versus opposition, LGBT ally versus traditionalist, just to name a few of the top 10, each one hating the other. We live in our camps of righteousness, lured into our holy hate and mutual mistrust of anyone who does not see the world as we do. And round and round we go, each side heaping its own holier-than-thought-ness onto the back of the donkey; around the shoulders of the ultimate prize fighter, Jesus Christ. We want the victory of holiness, we want the Revelation vindication as Jesus comes back on our side and proves us right for all eternity. Surely he will take our side (which is always the persecuted side from where we sit)—he himself was hated so much that they executed him. Surely this is the hero we want. Surely he will have his revenge. Surely he has something to say about all this.

It turns out he does; “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” Jesus disappoints every attempt to heap our human expectations upon him, and even in the end, refuses to be overcome by the blind, binary hatred of me versus you, I’m right and you’re wrong, even on the cross. The one man ever who had done nothing wrong was found guilty of not playing the game in the way that was expected of him, and for that he was put to death. Even on the cross, he is burdened with our expectations: If you are the Messiah, come down from there. If you trust in God, let God save you. If you’re right, prove it. But that was not who Jesus was then, and still is not who Jesus is now. Jesus points us to the way of love that surpasses hate, them and us, and all the rest, and that makes all the difference.

My friends, I know two things about full reality of Jesus. It is simple really: when it comes down to it, every last one of us will be surprised by what we encounter, and, on some level, we will be disappointed. Because it will turn out all of our expectations and demands will not, ultimately, be reflected fully in the reality of Christ. It will be bigger than all that. Jesus is always more than our expectations would make him to be; God always more than any metaphor can ever contain or any theology can describe, the kingdom always more than any single political or personal agenda, even the one that we think is the most Biblical. It takes some doing to realize that, and to live that because it asks us to lay down the Jesus we want, and look at; really look at and be changed by the Jesus that we are presented with on the cross, at the point we are least comfortable with him being, where we most want him to come out of. We want Jesus uncrossed, but that is not what we are going to get.

So what do we do with are persistent expectations of uncrossed Christ? How are we both honest about the expectations we hold for who and what God is, even as we continue to have the courage to discern God's will the best we know how (just because we will never get it fully right and have to let go of some of our expectations doesn't mean we should not try). The best we can do is to hold our expectations of Jesus up to the light of the way of Christ to know what is true, and what is not. We have to see what fits. We must hold our images loosely, knowing their imperfections, no matter how sacred they are, no matter how compelling we find them to be. We must be aware of the entrancing power they hold, making the image the god instead of the one who sent Jesus in the first place. We might begin to dismantle our own blindness to the reality of Christ by emulating him on the Cross in praying for those who we would call enemies 'God, forgive them; they don't know what they are doing.' But we cannot, dare not stop there. I know for myself, who has done so much wrong, I need to add something more in the exact same breath, just as each and every one of us do: "God, forgive me; because I do not know what I am doing." It is in forgiveness, of wrong done to us, and wrong we have done, knowing our images are not perfect and will not be, that release will always be found, and any true vision will be restored.

In this week of walking with Jesus toward the cross, I hope for one thing alone—a vision of who Jesus really is; that liberating vision that is beyond my own limited, expectations that would limit Christ, limit what I see. In this holy week, Oh God, grant us a vision of the whole of Christ, even Christ on the cross, that in seeing, we may be brought into new, abundant, loving life.