

We are a Group Project
April 10, 2022 – Palm Sunday
Luke 19: 28-40
Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church
Grand Rapids MI

I have a riddle for you, “what is white, green and sometimes yellow and has a nickname of the Trembling or Quaking Giant. Ok here is another clue; it is considered the largest of its kind, it is thousands of years old and has over 47,000 identical clones of itself today.”

It is the Pando Colony of Trembling Aspen located in the Fish Lake National Park in Utah. Now the average person, like myself, would not know that this forest of Aspen is really one giant organism. The average observer may assume that this forest grew from seeds over many years. But scientists teach us that there are many living things that spread through root systems and other means but are really clones of the one tree. Scientists estimate that the Pando Colony of Aspen is anywhere between 14,000 and 1 million years old with an average estimate around 80,000 years old. There is much debate on whether or not it survived the Ice Age. The word Pando is Latin for “I spread” and it certainly does spread.

The coolest part of this amazing tree is this. The roots are interconnected and work to communicate and care for the whole colony sending nutrients to struggling trees. It also works together to protect younger trees from disease, recover from draught, fire and other dangers. When it has been damaged by fire it recovers by spreading roots underground to start new saplings.

This and other networks of interconnectedness reminds us of the intricate web of connection that we have with the world and with one another. Our society has put such a value on independence and the individual that we sometimes lose sight of this basic

universal truth – That we were made for community. The reality is that we are all interconnected and interdependent upon one another. Our ability to thrive and survive as a planet is dependent upon the health of our interconnectedness to one another and our complex world. I believe that this is why Jesus came. Paul talks about Jesus reconciling the world unto God and that we are also called to the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the work of healing the severed connections we were meant to have to one another in God’s created order or community.

Today we see Jesus entering Jerusalem. He has been making his way to this moment proclaiming the good news through healing, preaching and doing all sorts of miracles. Last week we recalled Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Many are marveling at all that Jesus is doing, while others are beginning to plot how arrest Jesus. Jesus is drawing larger and larger crowds and now he is coming to Jerusalem on one of the biggest religious days of Israel. Huge crowds of devout people from around the world are converging on Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples are among them.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem the people begin to chant the words, “Hosanna, Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” This comes from Psalm 118:24-26 Which is recited during the Passover within the Jewish tradition.

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The word Hosanna is a variation of the Hebrew word translated here as “Save us” and refers to the many times God has delivered or saved the people of Israel from their oppressors. Passover is a commemorative event of that great deliverance from Egypt. So here we have a Passover procession reminiscent of Moses delivering the Israelites. For His followers Jesus is seen as another deliverer, as he enters Jerusalem. This event is tapping into their collective memory of their heritage and inspiring them of deliverance once again from the enemies of Israel.

The people were expressing an ache of their hearts that could not be kept silent. When we feel isolated, oppressed, alone in our struggle, we too cry out for salvation. We look to a power greater than ourselves to come to our aid. Often times we find that strength by banding together with others who know the struggle we share. We connect to the community and grow in numbers big enough that others take notice.

Sometimes it is for a popular cause that is not controversial, say a fundraiser walk for breast cancer. Getting together with others who have been touched by the pain of cancer find strength and inspiration as such events.

Other times it is a cry for justice in the face of brutality and abuse. Maybe it is a protest against the killing of an innocent black person or supporting the native American water protectors protesting the building of a pipeline. Such events may be met with violent suppression trying to silence the demands.

It may be a march of defiance as members of a group march in the streets claiming their place in society such as the Pride parades or the women's march. These events sometimes are more of a celebration than an angry mob as they celebrate their unique identities and contributions to society. They still experience various forms of discrimination and seek places at the tables of power and decision making.

All of these examples are reminiscent of today's Palm Sunday march as the people celebrated the deliverance of Israel by God's mighty hand. Passover was a religious celebration of God's liberation. It also inspired the people to seek for more liberation. It was also a time of celebration for their ethnic heritage in the face of their enemies. There is power in numbers as we come together to seek a better world for ourselves and others.

Unfortunately there is always some who disagree with our protests, our celebrations and so we see it in our reading as the religious authorities pull Jesus aside demanding the people stop proclaiming Jesus as king. Jesus' reply is "if they stop then the stones will cry out." This cry for liberation and healing is a basic need of us all.

So I ask you what are the things that make you want to cry out for healing, cry out for justice, cry out to be seen and understood? These are the cries that God hears and responds to through community. Where do you find yourself in the midst of this Palm Sunday crowd?

As a church we are called to be about reconciliation. We are called to be conduits of healing, justice and celebration of the unique gifts of all God's children. Like the Trembling Aspen we are created to be interconnected and sharing the nourishment and healing energy needed to thrive. We are not here to be alone and isolated, but rather connected through love and compassion seeking the good of all.

So as we enter this Holy Week I want you to consider in depth not just the historical significance of Christ and the Resurrection but also the present need of reconciliation in our world. Where does the power of new life need to be manifested in your life, the life of this church and community? How might God be calling us as a community of faith to continue on in the ministry of Christ as Ambassadors of reconciliation and justice around us?

What are the cries of your heart that cannot remain silent! How can we join our voices together in crying out HOSSANA HOSANNA GOD DELIVER US!