

Karen Hollis | April 10, 2022

Luke 19:28-40 (NRSV) After he had said this, he 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."

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Christ's name we pray. Amen

In celebration of Palm Sunday again this year, I invited people to bring greens from your yard or around the island. I reminded myself early in the week that I, too, needed to find some greens for the church; perhaps it was a prayer, because yesterday there were two decent size branches in the road in front of my house, as if they were placed there as a gift. I like the idea of using local greens, in part to reduce our carbon footprint, but also to help us remember that when Jesus enters Jerusalem, people waved what they had. By waving local greenery we not only honour the spirit of the day, but we bring the story of Palm Sunday here. Jesus rides into town on a donkey and the people wave ferns and evergreen branches and call out 'Hosanna, Lord please save us!'

We know the story, how the disciples fall just shy of stealing a donkey, how the people throw their cloaks on the road in front of him. We know the story, though as I like to remind us, it matters HOW the story is told. Luke sets up the story in a unique way.

In Luke's gospel, the story that comes right before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is the Parable of the Ten Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). A hated nobleman leaves town to get royal power for himself; before he goes he gives 10 pounds to his slaves so they can trade with it and increase his wealth while he is gone. When he returns, those who made money are rewarded, and those who simply kept their pound for the nobleman's return, were made to give their pound to the slaves who made money. The bystanders call out: he already has 10 pounds and you give him more! The nobleman says, "I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

Is it fair to say we assume God/Jesus is in the role of the person of power in Jesus' parables? That's my sense anyway. And that's primarily what we've been taught. But is that always the case? Does the nobleman seem like the God you know? What if the despised nobleman isn't God at all? What if Jesus is using the parable to talk about the Roman occupation of Judea and the surrounding areas? The lives of peasants living under Roman power were ruled by the words of the hated nobleman: "those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." With this parable, Luke sets the stage for Jesus riding into Jerusalem . . . with the people crying out: Blessed is *this* king who comes in the name of the *Lord!*

What does this story look like when we bring it here to these islands and inlets, where we wave ferns and evergreen branches? Which needs in you are motivation enough to remove your coat and lay it before Jesus? Which parts of you ache to be liberated? On whose behalf do you call out to Jesus?

Many of us call out on behalf of First Nations and Residential School survivors and their relatives. Pope Francis made an apology on April 1st to an Indigenous delegation at the Vatican. He said, "Listening to your voices, I was able to enter into and be deeply grieved by the stories of the suffering, hardship, discrimination and various forms of abuse that some of you experienced, particularly in the residential schools. It is chilling to think of determined efforts to instil a sense of inferiority, to rob people of their cultural identity, to sever their roots, and to consider all the personal and social effects that this continues to entail: unresolved traumas that have become intergenerational traumas."¹ The 58th Call to Action² calls for an apology from the Pope to be made in Canada within a year of the report being issued. And while he fell short of these, Pope Francis did seem heartfelt in his remorse for the intentional actions taken by church leaders and employees.

The 59th Call to Action³ calls on church parties to develop education strategies for congregations to learn about their church's role in the history and legacy of residential schools. As a congregation covenanted to learn about issues of social justice, I would say we are in agreement. In celebration of Palm Sunday, I bring *just a bit* of the history of Residential Schools from these islands and inlets.

¹ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/read-the-full-text-of-the-pope-s-apology-for-canada-s-residential-schools-1.5844874>

² <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/ucc-response-trc-calls.pdf>

³ <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/ucc-response-trc-calls.pdf>

Vancouver Island and the surrounding islands were home to 5 Residential Schools, all operated by churches.⁴ The Catholic church operated two of them. **Christie** Residential School (Meares Island / Tofino) from 1900 - 1983, and **Kuper Island** Residential School (near Chemainus) from 1890 -1975. The Presbyterian Church, and after denominational amalgamation in 1925, the United Church, also operated two. **Ahousaht (a-howz-at)** Residential School on Flores Island (west VI) from 1904-1940, after which it was a day school, and **Alberni** Residential School from 1900 -1973. The Anglican church operated one, **St. Michael's** Residential School in Alert Bay (near Pt. McNeill) from 1894 -1974.

I know you already have specific stories on your minds and hearts. I'm not going to do much to add to them, though I do find it noteworthy that of the 5 schools, 3 of them burned to the ground (and were rebuilt); Alberni burned 3 times! The students at Kuper Island set fire to the school in 1896 when their holidays were cancelled. My research found that remarkably no one was hurt in the fires. The stories bring to mind for me Jesus' words at the end of this morning's passage: "I tell you, if these [disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out." I like to think that creation was watching and Brother Fire was opportunist about consuming these places where evil was done, where so much was taken from people who at that point had so little.

Palm Sunday isn't the end of the story, it's close to the beginning, actually. Jesus enters Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, eye level with the people as he rides on the donkey. He is with all of us who call out to him, and with everyone who don't have the will to call out. He comes in solidarity to lead the way through healing and reconciliation, for this is his way, this is the peace he brings. Thanks be to God.

⁴ <https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/residential-schools-that-operated-on-vancouver-island-and-their-listed-deaths-4689759>