

# St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

## Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2017 - Palm Sunday

This is a week to rally in protest.

To protest against powers used for death and destruction.

To protest the use of chemical weapons.

To protest against retaliation and justifiable force.

To protest against tyrannical use of power.

To protest against torture.

This is a week to rally in protest.

To protest our own tendency to lash out like Peter who will draw a sword to fight when Jesus is arrested.

To protest against our fears that cause us to deny we love Jesus, that we are his disciples.

To protest when we fall away, lest we suffer a similar fate to the hope of the world.

This is the most emotionally charged week in the church year, as we wonder about love given for the sake of the world. And we know that we need this love and the hope of being lifted up from all that binds us. And God knows that the world needs it. Syria is just one very obvious example this week.

Jesus enters Jerusalem to the fanfare of crowds representing all our hopes and dreams. We join the ticker tape parade as we want him to overthrow powers that keep us oppressed. He piques the place of our own powerlessness and lament.

This week I received an email lamenting the state of the world. *I have been reading about the chemical attack in the innocent people of Syria yesterday & it has moved me to tears. Amidst all this global political rejection, evil men have been able to prey upon the innocent. Is there something our family can do via the Uniting Church to assist in our local community?*

As we feel helpless, we pin our hopes on powers that might overthrow. I shocked myself this week as I was momentarily glad that the USA had

lashed out in retaliation with its missile attack. I know it is because I too feel helpless and lament the death and destruction that power can bring.

I wonder how many have aligned themselves with Jesus as though he is the new power coming to overthrow an old tyranny? Many Jews believed in a Messiah who would save them from their oppressors and restore them to their land, including the Holy City of Jerusalem. As the crowd gathers in hope that Jesus is their man, they get excited as if he is the hope for the world...

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph. And yet he hardly comes in with Messianical force. We hear in the gospel of Matthew that this is foretold by the prophet: *Look, your king is coming to you,*

*humble, and mounted on a donkey.*

And as the events of the week unfold, things only get worse. Our revolutionary leader is sold out by a few silver coins and arrested in the garden. I can imagine the disciple, Peter, and his distress. This isn't the way our hope was going to run. It isn't part of the plan to have Jesus arrested before he has any chance to overthrow Rome. So Peter lashes out, he wields his sword, and cuts off the ear of one near him, not realising this is not the way of Jesus.

As Jesus stops Peter, the air is being knocked out the sails. The revolution is failing. At least it is failing for all who see that death has the final word. And so one by one people like Peter fall aside. *I never knew the man*, he says at his lowest ebb. What can we possibly do to overthrow the powers that threaten to kill and destroy all that is precious? What can we do to stop what is happening in Syria? What can we do amidst the struggles of our own lives where we pin our hopes on Jesus and yet the powers continue?

Jesus is silent in his defence. He accepts what Rome does to eliminate insurgents. And he hangs on a cross as silent witness to the powers that always seem to have their way. Except that he always invited us to see things in a new way. He invited us to see from the point of view of God. And God is not going to send in missiles or use whatever force is justifiable in order to change the world.

Jesus spoke often about the upside-down nature of the kingdom he belonged to. Rather than rewarding those who look after themselves, those who are least are given a prominent place. This means those who are most vulnerable to the powers. Those in Syria, those impacted by mental health, those subject to racism, those who struggle through domestic violence, those who are isolated, those who are sick, those who are in prison.

Whenever we feel lost, anxious, helpless, vulnerable, powerless, the king comes to us, humble, and mounted on a donkey, to gently protest against the order of power and invite us to see through it and beyond it.

This is a week of hope against hope. The hopes of forceful revolution rapidly fade away and yet something happens in its place. It can be challenging to see because it breaks the impact of the powers and yet the powers remain. Rome wins, Jesus dies, and hope is buried with him.

Except that God does not find limit in the way that human powers have their limit. For all who fight in Syria or within the relationships of our own lives, tyranny and death are the ultimate threat. Rome was very efficient through its use of crucifixion. Death has a way of making others comply.

But what if death is not the end? Can we possibly see the spark of hope in this life as Jesus breaks the seal of an Easter grave?

One of my favourite parts of the bible comes from a time after the mysterious events of Easter. The church is beginning to understand what Jesus taught during his life because it took his death to unshackle their vision and invite them into the mystery of what God can do. And so the apostle Paul helps the church at the seat of imperial power to understand what Jesus had done.

He says to them, *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8)*

We may struggle this week, and fall away like Peter and so many others. It is hardly surprising, given that the power behind missiles seems far more

effective than one who will seemingly not stand up for himself. We may struggle and yet we continue to be invited into a new world order, that threatens the powers of this world in the hope it gives us beyond their ultimate limit – the threat of death.

And we are invited to see and believe and be part of the story of God. Until we find that we are welcomed by God no matter what powers oppress us. And until we work for the sake of all who are oppressed by powers that bind them.

### **Blessing of Palms**

This blessing // can be heard coming // from a long way off.

This blessing // is making // its steady way // up the road // toward you.

This blessing // blooms in the throats // of women, // springs from the hearts of men, // tumbles out of the mouths // of children.

This blessing // is stitched into // the seams // of the cloaks // that line the road, // etched into // the branches // that trace the path, // echoes in the breathing // of the willing colt, // the click // of the donkey's hoof against the stones.

Something is rising // beneath this blessing.

Something will try // to drown it out.

But this blessing // cannot be turned back, // cannot be made to still its voice, // cannot cease // to sing its praise // of the One who comes along the way // it makes.

—Jan Richardson