

SERMON
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Holy Disruption (Palm Sunday)

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Mark 11:1-12 & 15-19

Today is Palm Sunday. It's a day in the church that I used to always like as a child – just like today I remember waving branches and marching around the church. Everyone would join in – not just the children. Everyone enjoys a parade. And like most parades, it's very easy to get caught up in the excitement of waving palm branches and shouting out with the crowds: "Hosanna". For just a brief moment, it feels like Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a joyous event. For a short time, we might actually forget the reason why Jesus is coming into the city.

And we may also forget that Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marks two major events: the jubilant entrance on one hand, and on the other hand, the holy disruption of Jesus' presence in the temple. Perhaps sometimes we focus too much on the parade with palm branches and shouting crowds. Maybe we're not even aware that the second part of this story is connected to the first. After his entrance into Jerusalem with waving palm branches, Jesus briefly visits the temple, silently looks around him, and then leaves the city as night falls. Just think about that short verse for a moment:

"Jesus went to the temple ... he looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve." (Mark 11:11)

Doesn't something seem odd there to you? I mean just a moment earlier the crowds had been shouting "*Blesses is he who comes in the name of the Lord*" (v9), and yet when Jesus enters the temple, he receives no recognition, he isn't installed instantly in the temple as the Messiah. No word is spoken. Everyone continues with their business. The cheering 'Hosannas' have fallen silent. The crowds have all dispersed.

Now isn't that a little odd? Doesn't that create an easy tension? And when Jesus just turns around and leaves, do you find your self asking "why?"

Theologians suggest that Jesus' leaving the temple indicates that he is aware that the temple is not "his place" – it's an indication that things need to be changed. It sets up a tension for the second part of the entry story. It sets the stage for the Holy Disruption that follows.

Jesus leaves the city to spend the night outside the walls but the next day he returns to again to enter Jerusalem. He goes directly to the temple, just like he did on his first arrival in Jerusalem. – and this time Mark gives us a very clear and detailed picture of what Jesus sees. Inside the temple area:

- there are buyers and vendors selling animals for ritual sacrifice to all the visiting pilgrims, and there would be lots of people visiting because of the coming Passover; and the vendors have probably set up pens of animals with all the noises and the smells that go along with them.
- There are tables of money changers who are changing visitor's currency in to the local coin, because that is the only currency that is accepted to pay the temple tax – and you can guarantee that it is not a fair exchange rate!
- There are benches and benches of doves, all cooing and pooping, because doves were the accepted offering for the purification of women, the cleansing of certain skin diseases, and offerings from the poor.
- And there were people that were using the temple courts not as a holy place of prayer, but as a short cut to carry merchandise from one place to another.

And what does Jesus do when he sees this? He moves in to action. He overturns the tables of money and you envision coins rolling every where. He upsets the benches of doves and now birds are flying around everywhere. He screams and shouts at the vendors to leave, and I'm sure they must have

shouted back. Animals are let loose, birds are flying around, coins rolling on the floor, people running everywhere.

It is a holy disruption!

It's a disruption because it seems so out of character for the Jesus that we like to think of as peaceful, loving and calm. And yet here he is clearly angry, mad and a force to be reckoned with.

It's a disruption because Jesus is prohibiting every traditional means of ritual and sacrifice that was tradition and cultic practise for religious worship at that time.

It's a disruption because when Jesus calls for the temple to be "*a house of prayer for all nations*" (v17) – he is referring to Jews and Gentiles alike – not just for a favoured race of people, but two groups that would never worship together!

It's disruptive because Jesus is directly insulting the leaders of Israel, referring to them as robbers with his accusation that they have robbed the temple of its sanctity and turned it into a "den of robbers." An accusation that Jesus knew would lead to his death.

And it is disruptive because Jesus' message of radically inclusive love disrupts our reverence for power and wealth in our lives today.

How are we to respond to this Holy disruption?

Jesus' radical message in the temple was for the Jews and Gentiles alike. He was calling them to unite, to put divisions behind them, to pray together in unity. That was radical! We too are called to live in acceptance with our inter-cultural and inter-faith brothers and sisters. We are put aside our prejudices and our learned behaviours. We are called to love our LGBTQ community. And we are called to actively speak up against racism, sexism, and injustices. To do this might require for us to allow the Holy Spirit to change our ways of thinking, and ways of living our lives. During our Lenten series of Spiritual practices, we were given tools to listen and experience the Spirit. I encourage you to continue using those tools. Yes, it may have been uncomfortable for some of you; it can be hard to reflect and discern what the Spirit is saying to you. But, just like Jesus disrupted the temple with his message, we too are called to allow the Spirit to stir us into a time of Holy Disruption.

In some ways the parallels are very clear between this story of Jesus in the temple, one week before his death, and our changing church today. Jesus was pushing the boundaries of the religious leaders and followers. He was teaching them to let go of the rules of rituals and sacrifice that had defined the faith; he was reclaiming the temple as a place to worship and to listen to God. In our society today, we too need to let go of how we define church; we need to recognize that our faith is more than just attending Sunday worship, and that we are called to actively live out the message of the gospel in our communities. Congregations in the United Church are to become 'communities of faith'; communities which will continue to come together, but maybe in different ways – ways like Messy Church, Jazz Vespers, Seniors Luncheons, Lunch N Learn, small group studies and devotionals. We need to come out and support these events; we need to invite our non-church going neighbors, reach out into our home and work communities to share the gospel message. Yes, it's uncomfortable. But church will not continue to be like it was before, so we had better be ready for the change. Jesus knew that as he spoke in the temple just one week before his death – he was warning them to get ready for what was about to happen! At Last year's Hamilton Conference, the president Gord Dunbar referred to the time that we are in as a 'Holy Shift'. I think it's a Holy Disruption.

Ask yourself, are you ready to walk with Jesus this Holy week? Are you ready to allow the Holy Spirit to disrupt your life? Change and disruption from the norm is not easy, but with God's Spirit guiding us, it is possible. Amen.