

Prophetic Art in The Way of Jesus
Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist
March 28, 2021
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Palm Sunday

*Based on Mark 11:1-11. * Symbolic Procession Into The Holy City*

“O Ingenious One,” we pray. “it is not only creation, but creativity that awes me. It is a wondrous, fearsome thing that you share your power to create.”+

“Let us rejoice in those crazy people,” we pray. Those *artists* “who somehow know the world is always unfinished, and who happily risk pushing and shoving and tugging and pounding and making love to it until it and all of us come out in more glorious shape.”

O Mysterious God, so many of us shrink from your power to create. But not Jesus and not The Twelve who are with him approaching Jerusalem as the Passover Festival begins.

Jesus and The Twelve know too well the fearsome thing creativity can be when wielded by those who have no hope for human wholeness. Jesus and The Twelve know too well *the flip side* of creative power. Like the Roman Empire that controls every part of their lives with its power “to make armies march” through “hate and lies” and just plain greed.

Jesus and The Twelve know too well the fearsome thing creativity that can be when wielded by those who have no hope for human wholeness. By those who care only for their *own* wholeness. Including those who *claim* to care “for the least of these.” Like the priests of the Jerusalem Temple in his time. Or the pastors of the Presbyterian Churches in our time. Who – by choice or by ignorance (or by claims of “neutrality”), while claiming to care for “the least of these” – instead side with *the flip side* of human creative power gone amok.

O Mysterious God, we say we shrink from this kind of “creative” power that breeds destruction. This power to crush the creative potential of those who are poor: to keep them from a free and fair voting booth, for example. O Mysterious God, we say we shrink from this kind of “creative” power that breeds destruction: to blow up the brains of our best and brightest through the barrel of a gun, for example. O Mysterious God, we say we shrink from this kind of “creative” power that breeds destruction: to try to trounce a non-violent spirit-led call to transformation through torture and trauma in the form of a cross, for example.

The power of divine co-creation wielded by those who have no hope for human wholeness – or shall we say in today’s climate crisis – the power of divine co-creation wielded by those who have no hope for *inter-species collective climate wholeness* – whether by choice or by ignorance – that kind of power controls every part of the lives of Jesus and The Twelve. And maybe, if we are honest, that kind of divine co-creative power gone amok controls every part of our lives, too.

Palm Sunday, at least in the Gospel According to Mark, begs a choice: Which kind of divine co-creative power will you choose?

In Mark’s Gospel (not necessarily in Matthew, Luke and John, but definitely in Mark), by the time we come to Palm Sunday, Jesus has spent three years begging that choice among all he has met. Remember the wisdom of the wilderness, he has declared, to peasants and scribes and landowners. From one village to the next. Over and over and over again. Calling the people to change their way of life. Calling them back to co-creative power *for the good of the whole*.

Remember *Torah* written on your hearts, Jesus has proclaimed these past three years. Remember the very law of love for God and one another that was meant to guide us all along to loving community in a land of promise and plenty *for the good of the whole*.

Which side are you on, Jesus has challenged the people to decide. Over and over and over again these past three years in the Gospel of Mark. The side of God's creative power enfleshed in humanity for the good of the whole? Or the side of God's creative power hoarded by some for the good of themselves?

This co-creative choice Jesus has begged these past three years all comes to a climax right here on Palm Sunday in the Gospel of Mark. Where, [according to biblical scholar Ched Myers](#), two "Passover Processions" – in the form of carefully staged street theatre – compete for the spotlight of the Jerusalem elite.

From the west the Roman governor enters the city. Pontius Pilate, himself. The hated symbol of humanly divine co-creative destructive power gone amok. Replete with a heavily armed military cavalry designed to intimidate any indigenous opposition to the Roman occupation of Jerusalem in this Passover Festival season.

From the east comes Jesus on a donkey through the city gates. A non-violent symbolic Declaration of Independence from that same Roman occupation. *And* the collusion of his own Temple with that occupation. Surrounding by a surge of peasants waving what the Greek describes as "cut straw from the fields." Brandishing the only "weapon" these peasants and day-laborers have in opposition to the swords surrounding Pontius Pilate.

This is "prophetic art in The Way of Jesus": calling the peasants and the day laborers, the Jerusalem elite *and* the Roman "powers that be" to remember who they *really* are ... and to whom they *really* belong: co-creators with The Creator of All. Not for destruction. But for flourishing.

Mark's version of this Palm Sunday street theater – this prophetic art in The Way of Jesus – concludes with the one the Jerusalem elite trusts to "save" them scoping out the Temple at the end of the day. Jesus is assessing the situation. And confirming his conviction that this so-called "religious" institution exploits the very poor it claims to serve. And everyone in the city who profits from the temple economy – which is pretty much everyone who lives in Jerusalem – is culpable.

Tomorrow, "Holy Monday," according to Mark's Gospel, Jesus will drive out those "Jerusalem elite" who are buying and selling in that Temple economy. Tomorrow, "Holy Monday," according to Mark's Gospel, Jesus will overturn the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those selling doves in that Temple economy. Tomorrow, Holy Monday, according to Mark's Gospel, Jesus will prevent anyone from carrying any vessel through the temple, literally *shutting down* the Temple economy *at the height of its most profitable season*. Calling this temple economy to account for its divine co-creative destructive power, whether or not those who participate in it do so by choice or by ignorance.

Make no mistake. This is a *radical* move. This is sabotaging Black Friday and Cyber Monday and Giving Tuesday right on through the Christmas holiday season. This is ripping the heart out of the Jerusalem economy at the exact moment that economy expects an infusion of cash.

This is Prophetic Art in The Way of Jesus.

Tomorrow, "Holy Monday," and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, according to the Gospel of Mark, with a sabotaged Temple economy showcasing human destructive power gone amok, Jesus will instead teach the gathering crowds to choose life-giving, life-affirming co-creation with God for the good of the whole.

And he will fail.

This, in the end, according to Mark's Gospel (not necessarily Matthew, Luke, and John) is what gets Jesus killed: disrupting the economic security of the Jerusalem ruling class – the very ones shouting Hosanna on this Palm Sunday – for the sake of the least of these. The peasant and the day-laborer. The undocumented migrant and the laid off coal miner. Whose only weapon to wield is the straw they cut themselves.

The urban crowds, according to Mark's Gospel – filled with the Jerusalem elite shouting Hosanna on this Palm Sunday – genuinely believe Jesus is coming as a violent revolutionary to save them. That is the symbolism they want to see in this carefully crafted street theater. They want the victory without doing the work. They want it for themselves and not for the poor peasant with the palm branch. This is why they shout for Barabbas to be released from the cross later this Friday, instead of Jesus. *Barabbas* is the genuine "revolutionary" in their eyes. Jesus – with his non-violent radical love in the way of the cross for the sake of the least of these – when all is said and done, looks like an "imposter" to the Jerusalem urban elite.

And the question remains: how does Jesus look to us, in this particular prophetic street theater on this particular Palm Sunday?

And how do we look to him?

"O Ingenious One," we have prayed. "It is not only creation, but *creativity* that awes me. It is a wondrous, fearsome thing that you share your power to create." Your power to *co-create*. Even at the risk of everything we think we hold dear.

I don't know about you, but I want to choose prophetic art in The Way of Jesus: this *awesome* power that God has shared; this power of creativity; this power of artistry "to create the beauty which casts this world into a more whole and holy dimension. ... [this awesome power that dares] to breathe visions and vibrations into dullness, as God breathed life into dust."

I don't know about you, but I want to choose the power of divine co-creation wielded *with* hope for *inter-species collective climate wholeness*, in the same way Jesus breathes life into the least of these who follow him waving branches of straw cut from fields they cannot currently own themselves.

I don't know about you, but I want to "rejoice in those crazy people," those *prophetic artists in The Way of Jesus*, "who somehow know the world is always unfinished, and who happily risk pushing and shoving and tugging and pounding and making love to it until it and all of us come out in more glorious shape."

And I hope you do, too.

Let the church say, Amen!

**Newquist Interpretive Translation:*

As Jesus and The Twelve approach Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus commissions two of his disciples for an apostolic mission.

Jesus says to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden: untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"

The two disciples pursue their apostolic mission and find a colt tied near an entrance, outside by the street.

As the apostolic-disciples untie the colt, some of the bystanders say to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They tell the bystanders what Jesus had said; and the bystanders hand over the colt to the apostolic-disciples, who then bring the colt to Jesus. They throw their cloaks on the colt; and Jesus sits on it.

Many villagers spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. A festive street party ensues, joining Jesus on the journey into Jerusalem.

Some people lead the procession ahead of Jesus on the colt and some people follow behind. Everyone is shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then Jesus enters Jerusalem, heads into the temple, and scopes it out for the week ahead.

Since it is already late in the day, Jesus heads back to Bethany with the twelve.

Through these words, may we hear a Word of hope. Amen.

+ "I Claim Your Power to Create," by Ted Loder. *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*. Innisfree Press, Inc; Philadelphia, 1984.