



Love Endures

TEXT
Matthew 21:1–11
1 Corinthians 13:4–8

April 5, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Jesus sent his disciples to retrieve a donkey. He said, “Tell them the Lord needs it.” It wasn’t just that Jesus wanted to take a donkey ride. This was a matter of necessity.

I wish we could have a parade today, to sing songs and gather with neighbors, and wave our hands in the air. I wish we could have a parade today to celebrate nothing more than just being alive. That’s the thing about parades ... they are carefree and can take your mind off the problems of the world.

If we had a parade like that, it wouldn’t be a Palm Sunday parade. No, this parade is not an escape from the problems of the world; just the opposite. This parade is born of crisis. The joy of the Palm Sunday parade grew from the pressure cooker of desperation. Those who tossed their cloaks on the ground and cut branches to pave his way, for them the world had fallen apart, and they were being crushed by Roman oppression. They shouted hosanna because they wanted Jesus to set them free.

They believed the Messiah had come. He would push the Roman legions out of Jerusa-

lem, chase them like scared children from all of Israel, and God’s Messiah would again sit on the throne of David, and they would once again be free. Their long nightmare was coming to an end. The crisis was ending. That’s why they sang. This parade was the beginning of the end of the crisis.

Or at least that’s what they thought. But the thing about crises, it’s hard to know when they will end.

There were others who followed him to the city. They were the ones who had been close to him. They loved him. And they were afraid. For them, the crisis was not ending, but just beginning. They wanted him to turn around and leave. They knew that coming to Jerusalem was risky. Those who loved him wanted him to slip away and return to Galilee, where the risk was deemed less threatening.

Maybe they remembered the time when he was preaching in his hometown and it didn’t go well. The crowds drove him to the edge of town, prepared to throw him off a cliff, and they would have if, inexplicably, he had not escaped. Not even the writer of the gospel knows exactly how

he slipped away. But no doubt, his followers wanted him to do so again. It’s not too late. What good does it do if he’s dead a week from now? Imagine the parables he never got a chance to share; imagine the deeds of power he could still perform. He just needs to stay alive. This was a crisis that could be and should be avoided.

Or at least that’s what they thought.

But Jesus wasn’t riding into Jerusalem to rule or govern or control. He wasn’t even riding into Jerusalem to resist those who would put him to death. He told his disciples that he needed to do this. He rode into Jerusalem to demonstrate an oft-forgotten attribute of love: love endures; love endures all things.

Andrew Sullivan wrote in *New York Magazine* earlier this month, “It’s quite possible that by the end of all this, almost every American will know of someone who has died. A relative, a friend, an old high-school classmate ... this will change us. ... All plagues change society and culture ... with consequences we won’t discover for years or decades. The one thing we know about (this) epidemic is that at some

point it will end. The one thing we don't know is who we will be (when it does)."¹

I don't know when this will end. I don't know how long it will be before we return to our sanctuary. I don't know what will happen between now and then. But I believe this: This crisis, like all crises, can't afford to be wasted.

Seth Godin says, in a crisis, "it's easy to abandon what we believe, because we assume that when things get back to normal, so we will. But we forget, the choices we make, even in a crisis, particularly in a crisis, shape who we are."²

Things are not normal and our normal ways of caring for others, of caring for one another, are not always available to us. We can't get together, or share a meal, or even visit our friends in the hospital. It's a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. We can't afford to waste this crisis.

This is a time to remember what matters most, what is needed, as Jesus said. I'm thinking about those of you who have children at home. Maybe in addition to teaching math and geography, maybe set some time aside to tell the stories that are important to your family. If your family or friends are scattered, maybe by phone or Zoom or whatever, reflect on the moments that have shaped your family. Or talk about moments in the lives of others that have inspired you and shaped what you value most.

Every year when we elect new officers, one of the things

I ask them to do is to tell their faith journey. Talk about the people who have loved you into the faith. Talk about significant moments that either by challenge or inspiration have shaped your faith.

In a time of crisis, when everything seems to be shifting daily, we need to dig deeper in the truth that sustains us. We need to remember what is needed, what is necessary. And you know what is needed.

Jesus said this parade needed to happen. No choice. He rides into Jerusalem because he is God's love for the world, and the oft-forgotten attribute of love is that it always shows up; and when times are hard, love endures.

Lisa Martin graduated from high school a few years ahead of me. It was a high in what had been a tragic year for her. After fighting it all year long, Lisa's mother died of cancer three weeks before graduation. Lisa walked up on the stage, received her diploma from the principal and school board official, then crossed to the other side and paused for a moment to allow the photographer to take her picture. As she did, she scanned the crowd. I am told that for a moment the gym was quiet as she made eye contact with her father. Mr. Martin was there with Lisa's younger brother. They were standing in their chairs spread out over the gymnasium floor. High over her father's head, he was holding a framed picture of Lisa's mother. She had to be there, or it just wasn't graduation — be-

cause, even in the face of death, love endures.

I don't know when this crisis will end, but I am trusting that when it does, who we are then will be better in lots of ways, as long as we remember what this week teaches us: that love is needed, and that when it's hard, love endures.

¹Andrew Sullivan, "How to Survive a Plague," *New York Magazine*, March 20, 2020. I am grateful to Rev. Bob Dunham, who cited Sullivan's article in his sermon preached for the First Presbyterian Church in NYC on March 29, 2020.

²*Seth's Blog*, "I'll Go With My Principles Tomorrow," March 29, 2020

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The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.