

Calvary United Methodist Church
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EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY

Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Do you like rock concerts? (I've never been to one.) Never been to a rock concert? Want to be in a rock concert? I've got rocks! Here. Take a couple. Hold those. Come on in. Who wants to be in a rock concert? Ok. You get these. Hold on to these. I need someone else to help me, here. Adrienne, could you help me out here? Give them each 2 rocks. Hey, I bet there are people out there in the congregation that will do this, right? (Knocks rocks.) We will, we will, rock you. You know that? (Yeah! Yeah!) You know that one, really? (Yeah, because I sang it on my bus.) You sang it on your bus? That's a song only old people sing from the 70s.

Well, this has a story here and the story of course is about rocks and...name a famous person... (Jesus!) You got it! You are so smart! Ok, so he was going to make his entrance into Jerusalem and it was amazing. Everybody was waiting for him. His name, his fame, had gone all over the place and so he got a donkey and that's a symbol because a warrior rides in on a war-horse, but a king comes in gentle on a donkey to rule in peace. And then the people started saying: Hosanna! Hosanna! And they were spreading their coats and garments and their palms before him. That's why we call it Palm Sunday.

And just then, some cranky people said: tell him to shut up! That's terrible isn't it? And you know what he said? He said: Look, if these people didn't praise me, even the rocks would cry out. Did you ever hear a rock cry out? I'm listening. Well, in the right hands, it does. (Hits rocks together.) We could make a rock concert that way, right? Okay.

You know, I thought about these rocks. Rocks come in kind of important in the Bible. There's a rock that Moses struck for the people because God told him to, and water gushed out. There was about five smooth stones like this that David took and put in his slingshot. He took out Goliath in a hurry, right? There were stones that Solomon used to build the temple. I've seen some of those things. Those are really big rocks. Some were about 12 foot across, about 4 foot deep, about 4 foot high. I don't know how they got machinery to do that way back then. And there is just where we talk about God as our rock in the Psalms, hold onto Him, He's our rock in the time of storm.

And Jesus is our rock. When we praise him, well then all creation sings. All creation just, in fact, when you just sing, and you just did, do you ever sing just by yourself? Just really belt it out? What do you sing? I left my heart in San Fran... No, you don't do that? Sometimes I'll hear Jeff singing. He crones. He's really good at it. He's got a good voice. Crones, dances, it's amazing. He's really talented. So what do you sing? Nothing, ok. We will, we will rock

you.

Well, when we sing and we give praise to God, I'll tell you what happens: You see people's faces light up. I mean I'm here looking at people's faces all the time. They just light up and there is just something about singing. And there's something that has been a Methodist tradition since the days of John and Charles Wesley that people just feel better for all the singing that they do. And they've even done some studies that when you are singling parts of your brain light up and you just feel better. Don't you feel better singing? You don't feel better when you are singing? (I feel better when I am singing.) Do you? You do? How many feel better when you are singing? There you go. You got it from an expert, a pro. And when we sing about the love of God, it makes us all feel better and it makes us feel great.

Ok, so, what kind of rock concert do you want to end with? (We will, we will rock you!) Ok, then do it. Ready? We will, we will rock praise you! Amen!

Thank you, Lord for our kids and help us to praise you always! Amen.

I'll trade you rocks for snacks, how's that? You don't have Cheez-its? I don't have Cheez-its, no. I'm sorry. We just have these healthy fruit snacks.

Message:

Would you join me in prayer? Gracious Lord, on this Palm Sunday, speak to our hearts and our lives, especially in this world where so few cry out in praise to you, but they cry in desperation, in war, in violence, in hatred. Help us to be the kind of people who praise your name and live with that extravagant love that you give to us in Christ. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your light, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, every year on Palm Sunday we gather just like today, and I'm really glad to see all of you, and we direct our thoughts to Jesus, to his walk to the cross. This is the sacred center of everything that we believe as Christians. Take away the cross, you take away who we are, you take away our salvation, take away the salvation that Jesus accomplished on the cross and everything good about the Good News just evaporates.

So, we do sense the importance of the cross. How many of us understand what was really taking place? Now, our redemption is a mystery of faith, what is something we are invited to peer in, but we'll never be able to wrap our minds all the way around it. But the Gospel writers all want us to grasp something important of all of this, because it is important or the New Testament wouldn't speak so much of it.

So, what did Jesus really accomplish on the cross? Well, the essential message of Jesus is that God's Kingdom has broken into our world, that Jesus is the one who bears the Kingdom

of God into our everyday human reality and the reason for this in-breaking is our world is broken. It is sick, it is at war with itself and that's because human nature is to want and desire and what it desires, well, we know that people will go to any length to get what we want to achieve the object of their desires. In some ways it's not a bad thing and in itself, but when it all turns inward to us, it does become a bad thing, that it leads to rivalry; it leads to injustice; it leads to violence. Ultimately it all ends in death as everything collapses in upon itself with the weight to desires and human being left to ourselves do this time and time again because we don't really understand what it means to be human.

To be a human being is to be fully alive with the glory of God. It is to be filled with the kind of love that creates each new day. It is to be filled with the gratitude that pours out of us the way that flowers will bend their way to see the sun. It is to love in a beloved community which cares, which reaches out, draws in outsiders, sees the face of God in everything. And this comes by love, the unselfish kind of non-self-seeking love, which the New Testament has a term for. It's called agape, which is the kind of love that loves for loves' sake because that's how you are put together. It is not a self-seeking kind of love, it is the serving kind of love. And apart from the intervention of God, very few have this as a natural state of being. But Jesus was filled to the brim with this kind of love. We are not filled to the brim with this kind of love. Actually, we are shaded from one degree to another and some so much so there is no life in them at all. Far from what God intends for us, we walked, some say ran away, from the love of God.

So, Jesus has come to us, proclaims the Kingdom of God has comes, turn around and believe is Jesus' welcome invitation. And by this Kingdom's entrance into your life, we begin to learn what it is to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven. And Jesus attracted disciples, people who would learn how to do this, began to mentor them in the way of the Kingdom of God, teaching them how to live this new life, a new kind of way. And for all of his efforts, what did he get? He got a lot of opposition. He had to tell them that even the rocks would cry out.

But most of the opposition Jesus faced was not the demonic kind, but the very typical human kind. It was political kind, the institutional kind, the underhanded and sometimes downright dirty kind that those in power did not want Jesus upsetting the system that they had set up to serve themselves. So they plotted and they planned and before long, Jesus understood that he was going to be hunted down and he would be executed. He understood that. And still he kept on, one step ahead of the authorities until it was his time; one step ahead of the institution and anyone else who wanted him out of the way, but the time finally came to face it.

But he knew, as we don't always understand, that the Kingdom of God never comes until a radical change opens us up and happens. And it would have to be, as Jesus understood it, something bigger and bolder and maybe crazier than ever before and none of his inner circle of disciples saw this. They told him to just kind of like, you know, let's sort of calm down this craziness. They had walked with him for three and a half years; they learned from him;

they watched him; they heard his teachings time and time again and they didn't get it. Just like so many of us. Me too.

Mary Magdalene? She got it. Which is why she broke open an alabaster box of precious ointment worth a year's salary, anoints Jesus' feet with it, dries it with her hair and she signaled to everyone who wasn't listening Jesus' death was coming. And Jesus loved her for it. Judas hated her for it and he hated Jesus for it too. He has his own complicity in what he was going to do.

We are no different. We may not use a cross to crucify Jesus, but we are complicit in his crucifixion time and time again. So many would do away with Jesus, just as they did away with anyone who opposed them, but not just they, but we. I'm sensitive that we use the language of contempt in Holy Week and we place it upon the Jews, but that's wrong. It is not just the Jews, nor was it just the Romans who we kind of let off easy. Actually, it's all of us.

All of us put Jesus on the cross. And we know that because this week we'll walk with Jesus, but we'll refuse to wash the feet of our friends. We will sit at Jesus at a table as he pours out his heart to us, but we miss the point of what he is going to say. We'll let our minds wander when he asks us to walk with him to Gethsemane as he sings his last song. And we'll sleep while he wrestles with the cross, to submit to God's will with his whole heart. We will miss the extravagant generosity of God in Christ upon the cross for us.

It will just be Easter. We will dress in nice clothes and then on Easter Monday we'll do whatever, because that's what we do. We don't always get that Jesus died a death that should have been ours. That he went knowing why and to what and for whom, for you and for me and for the migrant at the border and stockbroker on Wall Street and for the teen girl abused by the one who should protect her and the prisoner behind bars and the Isis fighter in the desert and you can just name all this. It's all of us and he died with the generosity that knows no limits. That God in Christ died our death, forgiving even those who hung him upon the cross.

Now, I'm getting ahead by a week, but we have read the back of the book, we kind of know the end of the story. When God overturned the human sentence of death in the resurrection, it was death itself that died that day. Death was no longer in the power of kings and emperors and governors. It was in God's power and it simply becomes the door to God, that the sentence of kings and princes and governors and rules was made null and void. And as Jesus arose from the grave he arose as new a new possibility, that new life for human beings, a new kind of life that is empowered by the love of God, that's what emerged and those earliest disciples saw it, they understood that because Christ is alive, the extravagant love of God knows no limits. And because of that, those early followers of Jesus and anyone who really gets this story, they are not bean counting, parsimonious, super biased, holier than though people. They are instead humble. They love generously, not counting the cost. They live generously, making the best of their time on this earth by continuing the work of Jesus. They give gener-

ously, not simply because the church needs it. The church always needs it. But they give because they understand what it means to give with the love of God. And in that kind of giving you can never out give God who blessed abundantly.

The goal of every follower of Jesus is not heaven. When you get Jesus, you get heaven already. Wherever he is is heaven enough. But the goal is to grow in love toward God and neighbor and yourself and we are often the hardest persons to love, aren't we? And when you do that, such a life is rich, richer than anything you can hold in your hands or stuff into an account or a portfolio. So the practice of this kind of love is a practice of generosity, it is the unselfish willingness to give in order that you can make a positive difference and leave this world a little bit better; to give in order to have a future and a hope for those living in darkness; to provide hope for those yet to come after us; to see down the road generations that there is something here preaching this message to a whole new group of people that we may not know. But we have something to give now.

So the practice of love is really a practice of generosity, extravagant generosity. I believe this, I really do. Some days it worries me. In God's presence we will review our lives and I suspect that all the things that we think are so important now, won't be worth anything at all. And I do believe this: the only thing that lasts beyond this life is what we give in love and devotion to Jesus. It lasts because as the resurrection proves, love is stronger than the power of death. Amen.