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The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme

April 13th, 2025, Palm Sunday

Text: Luke 19:35-42 4/13/25

On Shout-outs, Multitudes, and the Things That Make for Peace

"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Luke 19:40

Rain poured down my green umbrella into my collar and trickled down my back as I joined the wet crowd of about 800 other people for the Stand Out protests last Saturday. The chilly rain didn't stop us from assembling on this New England town square...there were parents and grandparents, high schoolers and families pushing strollers and holding umbrellas, there was the gregarious waving of rainbow flags and countless cardboard signs scrawled with every justice issue at stake. We raised our banners and chanted:

"What do we want?" "Justice!"

"When do we want it?" "Now!"

Later reporting indicated something like 3-5 million people showed up for similar Hands Off rallies held all over the US that day.

The urgency of the moment could be seen in the bold letters on posters scrawled with sayings like "There are so many injustices I'm worried about I can't fit them all here" along with SAVE USAID!

PROTECT DEMOCRACY and IMMIGRANTS R US, among many others. We were an upbeat, spirited crowd cheering at every car that beeped for us as it passed. Reading one another's signs and giving a thumbs up or a wet smile...

A crossing guard in a yellow tutu helped direct traffic with great exuberance.

My personal favorite read: "Where there's people there's power and We the People."

More shout-outs:

"What do we want?" "Justice!"

"When do we want it?" , "Now! "

While I can easily slip into despair at the state of our country right now, and fear what tomorrow may bring. Joining in another community protest reminded me that we're not alone in the wilderness. We're not the only ones concerned about the stripping of human rights, at the illegal actions of our current Administration. There's a whole world of people standing up and shouting out, too!

Lifting our voices against oppression is one of the small but mighty ways we can make an impact in the persistent work for justice. There are countless others, you all do...writing postcards, calling our congressional representatives, visiting those wrongfully detained, keeping our neighbors fed through the food pantry, opening ourselves up to our neighbors and partners across the world.

On the day that Jesus made his way toward the gates of Jerusalem, another passionate crowd met him on the road to the Mount of Olives. It was the Passover holiday so the city would have been bustling. Riding on a borrowed donkey, Jesus demonstrated once again the prophetic power of humility and compassion.

Was this a parade or a protest, or both? As the crowd around him shouted their Hosannas, threw down their coats, and waved (their palms), many celebrated the deeds of love they'd experienced or witnessed or heard about...Others, like the religious authorities, had other things on their minds.

Yet, Hope was in the air!

Their impromptu procession must have been in stark contrast to any other military parade with war horses that Pontious Pilate as the Roman governor, may have enacted across town.

The disparity on those dusty streets could be heard bouncing off the cobblestones.

Jesus came into the city on a donkey.

Jesus' peasant procession proclaimed the kind-om of God where the most marginalized were brought into new life; where the sick were healed, the injured made whole again. Where the tax collector, the overlooked, and the hungry child, were welcomed in, Where the multitudes were fed and there was enough, more than enough (in God's economy) for everyone.

"What do we want? "Justice!"

"When do we want it?" "Now!"

The character of Pontious Pilate on the other hand, exhibited the power of empire, the lust for domination and fear,

The greed of revenge and retribution. It was all on parade 2 millennia ago as it is now

A fellow minister wrote about Luke's version of the Palm Sunday (it's a passage that we find in all 4 of the gospels) text, "I find strength knowing that Jesus did not turn away from suffering; he turned toward it. He sat with, ate with, talked with, and wept with those who were suffering, knowing the root of that pain was often unjust practices and policies maintained by people in power."¹

Amidst the celebratory shoutouts around him, as he approached the Jerusalem gates, he looked out over the teeming city And what did he do?

He weeps (v. 19.41)

There's only one other time in the gospels that we learn of Jesus weeping. (in John 11:35 when Jesus learns of his friend Lazarus' death).

Here, on this day, Jesus weeps too. He weeps for all he sees. The ones falsely accused. The ones who have disappeared.

The ones who don't know where their children or their parents are. The ones who are the casualties of warring madness.

The ones sitting in detention.

The ones who are persecuted for being different and unique. The ones who may not know what they do but they do it anyway— because they can.

Jesus weeps.

For the ones who get it and the ones who don't. The ones who are lost and the ones who are found.

The ones who refuse to know the things that make for peace and instead wield unbridled power.

And the ones who will accompany Jesus to the cross and wipe his face and look for signs of resurrection on it.

But I'm getting ahead of the story.

Jesus weeps.

I wonder about those tears. His very human heart, like ours, is broken at the state of the world.

I wonder at his humanness.

I imagine his aloneness, too, even as he's surrounded by loud hosannas. He must have felt so alone....

How many of us know *that* loneliness...

Perhaps, he's not quite passed through the threshold into the city, and is in that liminal, reflective space. Maybe he takes a deep breath moments before those brave next steps.

The winding depths of Jerusalem await him.

I wonder if the shouts of the crowd made tears flow all the more and gave him the courage to go forward.

"'Hope", St Augustine said, "has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."

Jesus tears dry, he finds his voice.

And then, the clippity clop of the colt's hooves are heard again as Jesus' moves forward, with courage now and the sound of the disciples' jubilation in his ears.

"Be strong" the ancient Psalmist whispers or shouts in his ear: "Let your heart take courage." (Ps 27:4)

"Take courage."

Lift those palm branches high.

"What do we want?" "Justice!"

"When do we want it?" "Now!"

We know that from here to there, from Palm Sunday to Easter we travel many steps From Maundy Thursday to the crucifixion and then Easter sunrise,

It is not the end.

As a people of faith, we celebrate and lament together, imagine and re-imagine,

we potluck and resist together, as we pray and we sing, And we shout out and envision God's Shalom together; the Real things that make for peace.

We'll be reminded that in spite of the headlines and the very real threats that abound ...that we can and do imagine ANYWAY...that is the good news of the Gospel.

A table, a place, a community for all people in the vision of the kin-dom of God where all are invited to the table; no one is excluded. the kin-dom of God.

It's our dream work, our faith work.

Ancestor prophets and those of today remind us of our deep well springs of courage and compassion and faith. That we were made for times such as this...the early church after all grew out of a time such as this!

With the grace of God, we can keep "making way out of no way" making a way for what theologians Cudjoe and Gabby Wilkes call a JUSTICE IMAGINATION to grow that can rebuild what has been ruptured in our communities.²

This is our theological task...

All those protest posters are visible signs of a justice imagination at work

All those clipboards and signup sheets for the immigration ministry emerging here in the coming weeks are visible signs of a justice imagination at work.

All of those palms raised with our cheers.

Where do you see a justice imagination alive among us?

A "justice imagination is resistance at work", it is a theology of hope and possibility. ... Those with a *justice imagination* find it within their hearts to dream anyhow, to see afresh the possibilities. Despite the pain of the moment.

The drumbeat of the Passion is beginning to gather steam, so, too, are the cheers of solidarity today on this Palm Sunday with the God who stands on the side of the oppressed. Our God who stands on the side of Love always and summons us to step forward.

We can choose to see what Jesus saw at the Jerusalem gates at the beginning of another holy, unholy week ...

As we travel the road of uncertainty and fear together, as we wait and stand out and look out for the signs of resurrection in a Good Friday world, may we also find our own voices- bold or quiet May we savor the company of each other and remember we are not alone.

May we remember the things that make for real peace (not the lip service kind) and justice as we hit the pavement and pray with our hearts and our feet in a rainstorm or sun shower for our neighbors here, there and everywhere.

As a wise friend told me this week, "we all have to do our part or there will be no part to do."

Friends, even the stones are crying out:

“What do we want” “Justice”

“When do we want it”? “Now”!

Hosanna!

As part of our final benediction, I’m going to ask you if you can make a big circle in the meeting house upstairs and downstairs... You can certainly stay in your pew if it's easier....

I’ll offer the benediction and on the count of 3 we’ll shout 3 Hosannas/ And raise our palms

May God bless you and keep you

May God’s face shine upon and be gracious to you and give you peace And may we leave this place to go out and make a kinder, more justice world.

Amen.

HOSANNA , HOSANNA ,HOSANNA !!

¹ [https://www.ucc.org/springing](https://www.ucc.org/springing-forward/?inf_contact_key=abfd6d80ffe5fa2f0a9456a136271e3916358d5485884e2f31e6019a0d26c8b0)

[forward/?inf_contact_key=abfd6d80ffe5fa2f0a9456a136271e3916358d5485884e2f31e6019a0d26c8b0](https://www.ucc.org/springing-forward/?inf_contact_key=abfd6d80ffe5fa2f0a9456a136271e3916358d5485884e2f31e6019a0d26c8b0)

² Psalms for Black Lives: Reflections for the Work of Liberation (2022).