

Lenten Sermon Series: From wRecked to Restored-“From Useless to Useful”
Salem United Methodist Church
Mark 11:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:32-15:37
March 29, 2015
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Today marks the beginning of Holy Week in which we remember all that Jesus endured as he faced the Crucifixion. We shout our “Hosannas” today even though we know that the outcome of this week there is a death. On Friday, we will face the cross watching our Savior die, and cry out that all this is useless, but is it?

One of my favorite cartoons is Peanuts. Charles Schultz had an uncanny talent for commenting on life through the not-so-innocent lives of Charlie Brown and his friends. One of the cartoon characters is Sally, Charlie Brown’s little sister. She is always on a quest to find answers and ends up with a life philosophy of “Who cares?” In one cartoon, she is jumping rope with a smile on her face. Suddenly she stops jumping. There is a blank stare on her face. In the next frame she is wailing with tears spilling out. Charlie Brown ever the dutiful, loving big brother runs up to her asking, “What’s the matter Sally? What happened? Why are you crying?” She replies, “I don’t know. I was jumping rope. Everything was all right when...I don’t know...Suddenly it all seemed so useless.” This one cartoon is a commentary on human weariness. It creeps up on us when we least expect it. We can be happily “jumping the rope” of our lives, doing the things we do every day and suddenly we are hit with weariness, gloom, sadness, and even despair. For some of us we know the sun will rise tomorrow. The light will shine in the darkness somehow. For others the darkness of weariness is all encompassing. This apparently was true for one airline pilot this week. He could not see any way out of this darkness except to crash an airliner into a mountain taking away the lives of many innocent people. This tragic incident reminded me of a new song I heard this week called, “Heaven Don’t Come By Here.” It tells of a mother who died and was buried in an unmarked grave. One of the lines states, “No songs to sing, no prayers to pray, Heaven don’t come by here.” The slow, sad music echoes the weariness of the ballad.

So what does weariness of life have to do with being part of a parade welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem? Palm Sunday is the day to celebrate Jesus as we shout, “Hosanna, God saves!” That’s what the word hosanna means, God saves. We know God saves. We know that at the end of this week we will have another celebration in which we will praise God with “Alleluia, He is risen.” Jesus knew that, too, when he got on a colt for which he was probably too large. He more than likely had to raise his feet up so they wouldn’t drag on the ground. He chose this diminutive young animal to humble himself. Kings rode strong stallions, not a young colt that could barely support a weight of a man. Yes, Jesus knew all that would happen to him this week. He knew what he was facing, betrayal from those who pledged their love to him, humiliation before the people he loved, a trial, torture, and an execution. He knew that the people he came to save would treat him with the worst cruelty they could deliver. Did it all suddenly seem useless to him? After pouring himself out selflessly to humans who claimed to love him, who

wanted to follow him, who shouted and sang, “Hosanna,” it would come to this? As the people shouted their “Hosannas” was Jesus hit with weariness, sadness, and perhaps even despair? After all the parables about the kingdom of God, after all the healings, after all the miracles, after all the mentoring of disciples, does it have to end this way? Was it really worth emptying himself as God to become human? Was it really worth being a servant to humans to show them just how much God loves them? Was it really worth being obedient to God’s will? Was it worth walking down this lonesome road by himself? Did he suddenly think, “This is so useless!”?

I don’t know. We believe that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. As being fully human he experienced the whole range of human emotions. We know he laughed and cried. Perhaps he could have felt useless, too. We know we have moments when life seems useless, when we feel useless. But Jesus wasn’t just human. Jesus was also fully divine. He was God in human form. He emptied himself so he would not exploit his divine powers for his human gain. Remember how the devil tested him in the wilderness to see if he would abuse his divine powers? He passed those tests. He knew very clearly what he was to be about and what his mission was. If Jesus became overwhelmed by the feelings of weariness, he knew how to dip into the divine well of love to give him strength to carry on, to remind him why he came, to remind him who he is, and that he came to give life to us here on earth, life filled with joy, hope, peace and love, and the perfect life with God eternally. Jesus knew how to dip into that well of love to remind him why he came to be with us: to teach us about God’s love, to show us God’s love even to the point of death. Jesus knew how to dip into God’s well of love because he knew with every fiber of his being that God’s love is greater than all our uselessness, greater than all our darkness, greater than our deaths. Jesus knew he had come to show us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. None of what Jesus was about to go through was useless. In fact, it would be useful. This week is called Holy because it is what happens this week that turns our uselessness, our weariness, our despair, into something useful for God. Jesus left his home with God to turn our lives into something useful. Jesus left his home with God to create our home, to turn us into a Promised Land. There is another song I heard this week, called, “Promised Land.” It reminded me of Jesus emptying himself to serve us weary and useless humans. The song begins with these words, “I gonna climb up on that highest mountain. I’m gonna walk down that lonesome road. Tell me again how you left your home for the Promised Land. There I’m bending who came before and behind us... We may move slowly but in our hands we do remember what was made from clay and sand... We are not alone.” As we journey through Holy Week once again, “Tell us again, O Jesus, how you left your home to create a Promised Land for us.”

Resources: *The Parables of Peanuts* by Robert Short; “Heaven Don’t Come By Here,” and “Promised Land” from The Steel Wheels album, *Leave Some Things Behind*, <http://www.thesteelwheels.com/>