

## **SERMON: “like me: received by grace.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, March 25, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton

Today is Palm Sunday, the day in which we celebrate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem – marking the beginning of Holy Week, the four-act drama that leads, inexorably, toward the cross and Jesus’ crucifixion. By all accounts it was a chaotic/busy day. In the midst of everything, our reading – an account of an encounter – reveals, again, the true purpose of Jesus’ coming: that through God’s love the world – not just Israel – would be saved/welcome/accepted – received –by grace.

[Open Bibles p.918 – John 12:12-16: Jerusalem – 3 groups.]

In the days leading up to the event in our reading, Jesus had been busy ministering outside of Jerusalem healing people/preaching – and in the case of Lazarus, raising the dead: word had spread about who He might be/what He was doing. And now He was heading into Jerusalem, a city filled for Passover with pilgrims – the Greeks in our reading – from all over the ‘world’. Hearing that “*Jesus was coming for the festival,*” this “*large crowd*” became excited, began waving palm branches as they “*went out to greet him*” shouting/singing/ proclaiming Jesus king of Israel – hoping to see/hear from Jesus for themselves, hoping to be received by grace.

[Bandwagon jumpers/Johnny-cum-lately’s/fair-weather followers: A/TFC/TRock/BJ/L/R – knew God’s promises/didn’t know Jesus/but curious/like you/me.]

But, they were only part of the crowd/story – there was the crowd that came with Jesus, those who had witnessed the power of God’s Good News and were changed by it. Verse 17 tells us that those who had seen Jesus “*call Lazarus out of the tomb/raise him from the dead*” – those who had experienced the life saving and miraculous wonder of God’s grace – “*keep talking/continued to testify about Him/Jesus and this miracle.*” Like those we have heard about throughout Lent/this series, these were the lost/lonely/despised/marginalized people who Jesus attracted and welcomed – the sinners He ate with, the wrong people He talked to/spent time with; people like you/like me; people broken/hungry for acceptance – for grace.

[Mother: ‘*smile at people in the hallways of life*’ – acknowledge them/make their day.]

But Jesus did more than smile at people in the hallways of life, He welcomed/received them into His presence. Wherever Jesus went those who never knew what it meant to be chosen/accepted/redeemed/restored – whole – loved were drawn to Him: He put them at ease, made them feel wanted – He received them as/where they were – and they wanted more: they wanted to be with Him. Because they did, we’re told the Pharisees angrily decried the spectacle saying; “*everyone in the world is following Jesus!*” Like the righteous older brother in the ‘Prodigal Son’ parable, the Pharisees looked down on both groups – the motley crew of misfits/sinners/outcasts/criminals that Jesus attracted/followed Him, and the pilgrims, foreigners from ‘Gentile’ Greece, who were

2<sup>nd</sup> Class citizens in their understanding of the kingdom of God – both/people/groups they considered to be outside the reach of God’s grace. Why? To the Pharisees they were unworthy/unclean/undeserving of God’s grace/love/ let alone be welcomed/received into His presence: They were not “God’s chosen people.”

It is in the midst of all of this – the two crowds merging/noise/singing/confusion and the Pharisees rising anger/contempt – that the full extent/breadth of God’s grace is revealed. Our reading picked up with the very real – almost comical – exchange between the Greek pilgrims and Philip. As we heard, the pilgrim’s request to see Jesus is first asked to Philip who, in turn “*told Andrew. Then the two of them went to Jesus and told him.*” This leads to Jesus’ pronouncement that “*the time has come for the Son of Man to be given His glory*” – meaning that the purpose of His ministry was about to be fulfilled: that through God’s love – that, in Jesus, gave the world a second chance – grace did not come “*into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” (John 3:16-17): it came so it could be received by grace.

[Thinking/Adoption:Paul(Rom8:15) – “*Spirit of adoption:*” Roman – a feely chosen/desired/permanent relationship/initiated by the father that gave the one adopted a new identity/rights/inheritance. Stranger received as own child:ABBA/Father/God/love doing what love does.]

The invitation to the Greek pilgrims – people like you/like me – shows us that grace isn’t just for the few/good/righteous; grace – God’s love and all that that means – is available, free, for all who would accept it – because, right from the beginning, God chose us! The Good News is that although the Pharisees thought that God’s grace was only theirs to enjoy/dispense; it wasn’t. God sent Jesus to offer His grace to the world – to all those who only God could/would want/love/chose to be-with/come for/save – so people like you/me might be received by grace. Amen.