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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Psalm 31; Luke 22-23

10 April 2022 – Palm Sunday

Lent 6: Palm Sunday - From Power Over to Power With

*Greeting/Opening Prayer:*

Let us pray: God of great power and unfathomable wisdom, we seek you and your way this Lenten season. Help us to see how to best empower our neighbors and enemies toward life-giving and hope-filled relationship with you. Open our eyes to notice those moments when we have used our power over others for our gain. Forgive us for all that we do not see, confess, or repent of. Thank you for your steadfast love and patience with us. In Jesus name. Amen.

*Message:*

Our traditional Palm Sunday text is all the way back in Luke 19. Jesus mocks the empire's procession, which was when a great leader would come on a white horse with a legion of soldiers and battle weapons, signs of the leader's power and status. However, Jesus rides a young donkey into Jerusalem to the cheers of peasants and nobodies laying their cloaks on the road. In fact, the Pharisees try to silence the crowds out of fear of the empire's possible wrath. Jesus then clears the temple by turning over money exchange tables and getting the animals riled up so that the temple courtyard turns into chaos, disrupting all of the sales and exchanges that these vendors are offering to Jewish pilgrims arriving for the Passover feast. Jesus spends the next few days teaching in the temple and around Jerusalem. When we enter the story in Luke 22, we realize

that Jesus has already set himself on a collision course with the powers that be: the Jewish religious leaders of the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor who was to keep the peace.

As you have heard in other communion sermons, the political and cultural tension of celebrating freedom from ancient Egypt while still being under occupation was palpable as Jesus tells his disciples to find a place to eat the Passover meal together. The author of Luke sets the stage by letting us know that the Sanhedrin is prepared for Jesus's arrival, seeking a way to end his ministry and his life so that the Romans do not respond to the large crowds that he gathers with swift and crushing retribution. We just don't know all of the reasons that Judas Iscariot offers to betray Jesus to the Sanhedrin. What we do know is Jesus's example and response.

Jesus hides from the Sanhedrin and secretly moves about the countryside and the city even as they seek out a discreet, but ultimate use of their power over the people in ending his life. When Jesus could be making tactical decisions and training his disciples for the fight of their lives in retaking Jerusalem, something he would be remembered for as possibly one of the great liberators of the Jewish people during Roman occupation, Jesus instead gives his followers a meal. Jesus takes the very meal (unleavened bread and wine) that they have celebrated for over a thousand years and re-interprets it in light of what will soon be happening. As they sit around the table, Jesus does not teach them how to properly rule a new empire established on the blood of its enemies, the Romans or the imposter Jewish religious and political authorities. No, this kingdom will be built on the suffering and blood of its king and its renewed people, for just as he was, they will also be servants, risking their status and well-being to betrayal and suffering as their enemies foolishly think that wielding power over will bring new life and hope, rather than seeing clearly that using power over has consistent results of death and destruction.

From the meal together to the cross, Jesus re-defines again and again how we follow his example in relating to power, control, coercion, and violence. Even when arrest is imminent in the garden, we find Jesus praying, asking God for strength and endurance while the disciples seem to be blissfully unaware of what will be required of them. When the disciples finally realize what is happening and lash out at the crowd that has come to arrest Jesus, Jesus heals and mends the injured, while giving the disciples time to scatter in the darkness. Most political insurrectionists, as the Sanhedrin would soon accuse Jesus of being, were put to death along with their followers as examples and warnings to anyone else who might try to remove Rome's grip. As violence begets more violence, so the tendency to wield one's power over another is often foolishly assumed to be solved or resisted by meeting that power with even greater shows of power. Rather, Jesus does not put up a fight, yet exposes their supposed bravery as cowardice: they are only so enthusiastic to arrest him because their actions are covered by darkness and a lack of witnesses, which the crowds of the days before would have offered. Often, the forces of evil use darkness to show how weak that they really are because if they were exposed by the light, they would wither in its true power, the power of truth, love, and hope.

As Jesus heads back into Jerusalem in the hands of Judas Iscariot's entourage, he seems to fortify himself for what is to come. Insightfully, Jesus does not seek to defend himself in the sham of a trial that the religious or political authorities offer. Jesus knows that his fate has already been sealed by the injustice of the system, so he will not be entertainment to the Sanhedrin or Herod or Pilate, playing along with their games and offerings of supposed pardon if he would just come right out and say who he really is. Yet again, Jesus reveals in his actions how the truth would be too much for the forces of evil at work to destroy him. Little do these leaders and powers realize though that in mocking and beating him, in placing a robe on him and

scourging him, in leading his procession and elevating him as the King of the Jews, Jesus again is unmasking their true intentions, their ruthless and evil brokenness, their real powerlessness. In this moment which appears to be Jesus's greatest humiliation and degradation actually is his moment of glory. Jesus has been crowned, enrobed, and enthroned as king for all to see on the hill of the Skull, Golgotha. What those who have used power over to its fullest do not realize is that their supposed victory has really been their greatest moment of defeat as God will soon bring vindication for Jesus's suffering. Human evil and brokenness will be no match for the God who suffers along with us and yet brings resurrection and steadfast love. Not only that, but Jesus's example in the journey to the cross will be the empowering moment for his followers when they carry the message of hope in Jesus, the true servant-king to all of the world.

*Closing Prayer:* Let us pray: we give thanks to you, O God, that our wisdom is not your wisdom, our ways are not your ways. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. The horse that led the victorious warrior got lost, while the donkey still knows the way. As children on our bikes, we learned that although our instincts tell us to hold on tight and try to hold on tightly will fall, while all those who hold with the light hands of trust will stand together. Although we may feel rejected as Jesus was rejected, we trust that we stand together in your powerful love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.