



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Soul Weaving”

Matthew 21:1-17

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

“It takes a whole lifetime to belong fully in your life...”

With these words John O’Donohue, Irish writer, begins a poem from his book “Eternal Echoes.” O’Donohue goes on to say, “It is almost as if each event, encounter and experience is a pathway to be explored and lived. Then the wisdom of the soul harvests it, and brings its treasures back in along the pathway until they belong to the deepest circle of your self. Each day we voyage outwards and at evening our souls bring home what we have suffered, learned and created.”

How’s that for an image of the way we deal with what we go through. For O’Donohue the task of living and growing in God or in the soul is a task of becoming a fully alive, a fully knit together soul, weaving together like a tapestry, each painful, ecstatic, monotonous and lovely moment until we fully belong in our life. There is a sense that every moment matters to the soul that is awake to its meaning. In some ways he is saying that the only way to inhabit our life, and develop as soul is to live and weave in the experiences and learnings and creations of our life into our soul- and that takes a lifetime. It takes years and years of life’s experiences, of the world changing and you having to move with it, of highs, and lows, of achievements and failures, to come to a place of living fully in our own skin, in our own life.

In the United Church Creed first written in 1968 we say, God has created and is creating. I think O’Donohue is trying to tell us that this process of being created is one of living life, experiencing and the soul harvesting that experience and weaving into the deep circle of the self- and that is how God has created and is creating in the soul of each one of us.

Now why am I telling you all this on Palm Sunday as we begin our Holy Week journey. Well, Palm Sunday has always been a struggle for me. The traditional songs and the traditional way of characterizing this moment in Jesus life has never rested easily within me. The church has talked about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Hosanna, the little children sang. And yet Matthew talked about Jerusalem being in an uproar, and no sooner does Jesus enter Jerusalem than he goes to the Temple and angrily casts out the money changers. And this act leads to the powers of this city taking aim at him, and in the powder keg of Passover under Roman occupation, the week spins out of control and leads to his execution in a most ghastly of ways. So for me, Palm Sunday feels like the gateway to the most intense series of events in the story of Jesus’ life and the narrative that shapes our faith.

Jesus died before his time. He was executed. And in his last days, he lived a lifetimes worth of moments. As we move through this week, Christians all over the world will re-enact those moments, remember each in all its intensity, one experience at a time. There will be a gathering on Thursday where several United Churches come together at Bethany Newton United to remember that on the night he was arrested, he gathered with his friends for a very significant meal which we continue to remember, and he washed their feet, and he left and went into the garden and prayed the prayer of his life, "not my will by thy will be done." And on Friday

morning the same cluster of churches including ours gathers at Crossroads to remember the last day of Jesus life, his suffering and death, and we pray for the suffering of this day. And then we, like the original disciples, wait. Saturday was that incredible day of waiting, and on Saturday there is a gathering for prayer here from 10am to 2pm. Prayer in many forms. A spiritual practice time to walk the labyrinth, And we do this because there is a lifetimes worth of moments packed with meaning and significance to be found in this week. Each one was a harvesting of painful, poignant experience that then became woven into the deep circle of his being.

For example, on Palm Sunday, Jesus enters the city, and he doesn't really know what is coming. He only knows that God is with him and this is his path. How often have you entered into a situation not knowing what is coming and trying to believe, and trust that God is with you? He enters the seat of power and his message comes abruptly up against the inertia of the social, religious and political norms. How often do our ideals and the way we want to live and the way we want the world to be come up against the inertia of the social, religious and political world we live in- or how often does that happen even within ourselves. In the temple, he sees that a holy place has been turned into an exploitative commercial place. Wow! Does that ring any bells?

Every moment of the story of this week is filled with the moments we ourselves live as we seek to follow in faith. This week touches every human emotion, the deepest struggles of humanity; it moves through longing, hope, disappointment, grief, fear, bewilderment, acceptance, new life where we thought all was lost. It moves through all of that.

And just like O'Donohue says, we watch Jesus, as we watch ourselves, harvest each moment, and weave it into the deep circle of the soul. We watch Jesus belong to the life he lived in these difficult days, belong to the path he is on. He did not kick and struggle to get out of it. Sure he played a real active part. The money changers felt that. But at the same time, he moved through these events taking each moment and weaving it into some greater, deeper reality. He demonstrated what O'Donohue calls belonging fully in your life.

So for me, Palm Sunday and the events of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem no longer hold the triumphal significance that the tradition has placed on them. Jesus is not entering Jerusalem to conquer it in any way: not politically, not spiritually. No, he is following his call to live the vision of the Kingdom of God, the economy of love which is a radical alternative to that of the empire, but he is doing that at the very center of social, religious and political power of his day. And this will mean that his final days will blaze with a lifetimes worth of power in one week.

And our job this week is to witness it. Our job is to be part of that story both by gathering and re-telling and re-experiencing the story, and by seeing the way this intense week resonates with God's creative life unfolding on our own experience.

In the final stanza of his poem, John O'Donohue writes: "The soul is more ancient than consciousness and mind. Each day your soul weaves your life together. It weaves the opaque and ancient depth of you with the actual freshness of your present experience. The soul is the home of memory." As you journey in and out through these holy days, may it be a soul weaving time. Amen.