

## “A Hopeful Return”

(Based on Mark 11:1-11 and Palm Sunday)

It had been a long day. Getting up in the morning in Venice. Taking a water taxi, a local bus and then a plane. We flew to Amsterdam and lay over there for three hours before catching our flight to Toronto and then the last leg home the drive to Guelph. The long journey was boosted with the hope, the enthusiasm of coming home -- sleeping in a familiar bed, being embraced by accustomed surroundings, seeing the kids again. There is something about coming home that gives a tired soul refreshment.

Kay Cho shares about her hopeful return in this year's United Church Lenten guide, *Faith on the Move*. Hers was from a different time and in a different part of the world. Yet the call to return was not just hopeful but joyful. Kay shares,

“When the armistice for the Korean War was declared in 1953, we returned to our Seoul home from Busan on the southeast coast, where we had taken refuge. The frame of our house was tilted, many roof tiles were missing, and the rooms were filled with debris. It took so much time and work to

clean and repair the ruins. But that was countered by the joy of returning home, and the hope that the children would continue their education and play without fear of air strikes and explosions.” P. 82

*Faith on the Move*

Kay captures this sense of return even the face of the work that needs to be done, the destruction and ruin they faced. They could dream again and almost breathe again for a future where children were learning at school and they could play without fear. The return to her Seoul, Korea home renewed her spirit.

I would suspect you all have had such moments of returning hope. Some may recall the end of the Second World War and the anticipated return of dads, and older brothers in addition to older sisters. You may recall the time of coming home after a stay in hospital or time away at college or university. Bob Foster was telling the other day about how he grew up in Fergus, but life and work took him away to Ottawa. He felt like he was coming home again when he returned to Fergus in 2006. It felt right somehow.

Kay reflects wasn't this what Jesus was doing that Palm Sunday long ago...

“With the chorus of Hosanna ringing in his ears, Jesus journeyed home – not to his birthplace or hometown, but to God’s house, the temple in Jerusalem. Riding on a colt, he came in humility, determined to restore the house of prayer from the den of robbers and hoping to build the kin-dom of God for the generations to come.” P. 83 *Faith on the Move*

I have preached this passage many times over the years, but this is the first time I had thought about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as a homecoming of sorts. He was returning to the place where the faithful came to remember the gifts of God in their lives and was returning at the special time of year where God’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt was lifted up called the Passover. Jesus was coming home to the heart of God and it must have contained some of the same feelings of hopefulness for him. It must have helped him face a journey where he saw the collision course ahead with the religious and political leaders of his day. But he was returning to a place where God was too.

So often in our lives we are longing to return to such a place where we are at home. Sometimes in our living we think this is a return to the ways things once were. It is an appeal to nostalgia, and former ways, and reading, writing arithmetic. We long for days where we felt life was simpler and the rules clearer. There is a part that longs for this place of security and knowing.

Our faith lives are tempted to buy into the same thinking. Going back in time, living by the Ten Commandments, singing the old favourite hymns, making church the way it was. These memories for some of us bring familiarity and comfort. The longing is understandable especially in changing and uncertain times. The tried and true sounds very inviting.

This is perhaps no truer than just now with the COVID challenges. We haven't seen friends or family for a long time. Some of us have lost our work and our business. Some of us have missed singing with others. Others of us haven't set foot in the church for over 12 months now. As someone posted on Instagram this week, all I really want is to

be at church this week parading around the church with my palm branches with the kids and just having that experience again. We know the pull of returning to places that feel like home for us.

Yet as we know Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was more than a return home for sentimental reasons. Jesus came to Jerusalem choosing to ride a donkey, taking a path that spoke of God's liberation, planning this time to arrive in the city when hopes and tensions were both high. The people were expecting God to act again. Jesus arrives not to return the people to a past glory. He is pointing them to a new relationship with God to be discovered. God has more of a story to tell.

Kay Cho invites us to come home in a new way this Palm Sunday. She reflects, "We are called to come home sing Hosanna (God Save us now) as we restore our beautiful Mother Earth. She has suffered long at the hands of her greedy, indifferent and abusive tenants. In love, respect and honour of our Mother Earth, we are called to restore a house of prayer for all the nations with fresh air, clean water, fertile land, and a just and peaceful society." P. 83 Kay

is seeing our homecoming as a time to clean up and restore the earth.

What are you seeing? Improved relationships with others; making good choices for neighbours during a pandemic; letting God reshape your view of yourself; recalling in even in tough moments God is near and here with you. There are hopeful returns to discover and experience.

I would invite you to ponder these returns this morning -- where is Jesus inviting us to return back to the house that was or to the house that God was still building and transforming? I believe we are returning to the story of God with God's people. Yet the story is not a repeat of old episodes to watch over and over, but a sequel or a new series with God being present and Jesus playing the lead role. Jesus is about to show us how the ruins can be cleaned up and a new roof be added on. Jesus' arrival is to show us more about God's ways and perhaps reveal more about us too.

Where do we start – by entering it, embracing the return to the heart of God for us.

Frederick Buechner shares a dream that came to him. His dreams he shares are often reflectors of the subconscious grace of God at work in him. He goes on to say he use to dream often and frequently of being in hotels, whatever that means he offers. 😊 He had this wonderful room that he remembered less visually than about how good he felt in that room. It was just the right place for him. He was at peace and happy. And then the dream went on and he had other adventures which he has forgotten. But he found himself back in the hotel again trying to find that room where he felt so good, so at peace, but unfortunately he didn't remember what the room number was. It was a big hotel. He went down to the desk and somebody at the desk was there. He told him he was trying to find this room but couldn't remember the number. The hotel person told him, "Oh, its' very easy to get to that room any time you want. It doesn't have a number, it has a name." "A name? What is the name of that room? He told me the name of that room was "Remember". It woke Buechner up. He shared he didn't fully understand the dream, but only that it gave him a clue. He goes

on to say it gives us all a clue that if we remember far enough, remember deeply enough, we will remember God, remember Eden, remember where you came from and that through remembering you work your way back to some truth that is liberating and healing truth.” P. 63, 64 *The Remarkable Ordinary*

He is inviting to remember to return to where God is found and where we are discovered.

Jesus entered into Jerusalem that Palm Sunday remembering. It was a hopeful return.

*Sermon delivered by Rev. Bruce Dickson at Dublin Street United Church, Guelph, ON for Sunday, March 28, 2021. For personal use or study purposes only.*