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"The Palm Sunday Gap & ALDATT" The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
(03/24/2024, Palm Sunday)

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You may not agree with me, and critics certainly don't agree with me, but red in 2012 was Taylor Swift's best album.

I'm not pandering. I know Taylor Swift is sort of a okaran right now, and people have strong feelings of love or hate, maybe even indifference.

I'm not trying to win any favor or offend anyone. I just think that's the reality.

This album where she broke from country to pop, but I bring it up for one reason. That is the song on it that to me connects with what we're doing today for Palm Sunday, which is we are never getting back together in which she says we are never, ever, ever, ever getting back together like ever.

This is a situation in many relationships where the two people are on completely different pages.

This relationship has ended, but her ex refuses to let go. He doesn't really want to enter into reality, and Taylor is clearly already there.

I don't know if you've ever had that experience where you are kind of here, and the other person is in a completely different place of denial.

I in November had a single vehicle car accident. I was on my way to Houston, and then to Galveston to do a wedding.

15 minutes north of Houston on 290, something happened. I don't know what, but I do remember coming to in my stopped car with the airbags deployed and looking around and wondering what had happened.

And then a few moments later, as I sat in the ambulance, I called Andrea to tell her what had happened, and to tell her I was fine, and I would just rent a car and still do the wedding in Galveston.

At which point Andrea said, we've already had this conversation twice. You will do no such thing.

I was doing that very human thing of denying a crisis, not wanting to acknowledge reality.

If you've seen the movie Blackberry, or maybe you know the story, this little smartphone which created the market and was desired by all tech savvy people everywhere, high stock price, great brand recognition, and then Steve Jobs announced something called the iPhone.

And if you see this movie, it's on right now. You can see the CEO of Blackberry again in complete denial of why would anyone want something. It's just one big dumb screen. We have an actual keyboard that clicks.

It's fine. He tells all of his other executives. It's fine. This thing will flop.

Major gap between reality and where he was living in his head. Human beings have a really hard time moving from the comforting warm waters of denial into the cold, bracing icy waters of reality quite often. We don't really reckon with what's going on. And I do think that on some level, all humans are experiencing ALDAT.

It's a new syndrome, ALDAT, a little denial all the time.

When you look in the mirror in the morning, ALDAT.

You know this is true because then you see a photograph of yourself and you're like, I don't look like that.

Or maybe you have one of these experiences, you lose your temper and you think to yourself, well, they know I was just caught up in the heat of the moment.

I get a little passionate sometimes. I have strong feelings. They know I love them. They didn't really mean it.

ALDAT.

Lots of people drink at lunchtime. Just celebrating the end of a hard week.

ALDAT.

I don't need therapy. Those people don't know what they're talking about. I'm just a little down.

ALDAT.

The story of Palm Sunday is one where human beings are having a very hard time accepting what is happening.

But there is a liberating word from God here that I want to talk about. I'm going to set the scene.

There's a very brief thing where I think I need to explain why we do what we do here with the palms and the whole bit.

But I really want to get to what it means for us.

Jesus' ministry was in the 30s AD during the days of the Roman Empire. And in Israel, the country we now call Israel, it was Judea then. It was conflicted then just as now.

It was a place that people were fighting over who controlled it then as is now.

And back then the Romans had it. They were in charge of it. It was their province.

And the Jewish people wanted it back. And they wanted a rebel leader to stand up and lead the charge.

This has happened many times in the decades and centuries before Jesus' time.

The Jewish folks rise up in rebellion, try to take the land back.

And many people thought Jesus was going to do just that.

They wanted a king, a victorious warrior to lead them, to raise a militia and to kick the Romans out.

The disciples thought this was what Jesus was doing from the very

beginning.

They keep asking, now are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel throughout his ministry?

You heard it in the Palm Sunday reading that we had in the courtyard from Mark 11 where they say, the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David. This was not a metaphorical kingdom.

This was not a spiritual kingdom. The coming kingdom of our ancestor, King David.

King David sounds like this religious term someone that had been dead a long time ago.

It's sort of like when people chant today, four more years, four more years.

You know, a real leader that you want back in power.

And that's what they're saying.

Susanna, blessed is the coming real life kingdom of our ancestor, David.

Jesus, remember his dad, Joseph, his earthly father, Joseph from the line of David of the House of David.

That's why he was born in David's hometown, Bethlehem, that whole thing.

That is what they want. They want Jesus to lead them and restore the very real monarchy of David.

They've been frustrated waiting for three years, all these miracles and sermons and miraculous feedings and healings and all that.

Just setting the stage for the real thing, which was this coming kingdom of our ancestor, David, now finally restored.

And now he was going to do what he had come to do. Finally, now this is what not just the disciples thought,

but all the people in the temple, the Jewish leaders, all of them thought this is what is happening too,

which is why they had been watching him.

This was the whole point of the triumphal entry. And Jesus knew this too.

This wasn't the first time somebody entered Jerusalem in triumph. This is not the first time.

This was a big thing with the Romans.

When Caesar defeated the Gauls, he had four triumphs. That was the name of the thing.

The parade you had, it was called a triumph. And you would march into the city.

And you would wear a purple toga, and you would put a crown on your head.

You would ride in and celebrate your victory. Sort of like Will Smith. I looked at my kingdom. I was finally there to sit on my throne as the prince of Belair. Thank you, Alan.

So Jesus comes in. He does this. He's here to sit on his throne.

Everybody gets what's going on. This is what you do when you're an entering king coming in triumph.

They think he's probably going to maybe gather his people, form a

plan,
start a riot, storm the castle, whatever it is.
But there was a little clue back in Mark 11, which you heard moments ago in the courtyard,
that that might not be what happens. When Jesus is arranging all the details for this triumphal entry,
this Palm Sunday, he has to get his cold, his donkey, and he tells the disciples,
go, take this cold, and if anybody asks you, I say the Lord needs it, and he will send it back here immediately.
He's not just taking the cold, grand theft cold.
He's going to send it back immediately, which is an indication that he's not going to need it anymore.
He's not going to lead troops into battle. He's not going to ride around gathering followers.
The Romans are coming. The Romans are coming. None of that.
Because he knows, unlike everybody around him,
this huge gap between what is real and what they think is real, he knows that our biggest problem, their biggest problem, was not the Roman Empire.
A significant of a problem as that was. It was a brutal harsh, corrupt empire,
but that was not their biggest problem. To quote a familiar poet, I'm the problem. It's me. Our problem is us.
Our problem of sin and death.
And so instead of attacking the Romans, trying to destroy the death star,
he will get off that cold and he'll send it back.
And instead of gathering troops, he will go to a meal, his last supper.
And instead of attacking the Romans, he'll go to a garden.
We'll try to pray, but mostly he'll just wait for the Romans to come and arrest him.
He'll be put into custody, handcuffed, put on trial.
In a trial that will be totally rigged, a complete foregone conclusion,
and he will be sentenced to die.
This triumph has turned upside down.
He does get a purple robe and he does get a crown, but it's put on him to mock him and to shame him.
Sometimes in a triumph, the Roman leader would paint his face with red paint
to claim identity with Jupiter. And of course, Jesus' face is red, but not from paint.
We thought we were getting a king.
We thought we were getting someone to fix our problems and put in the political system that we wanted.
But when that's not going to happen, the disciples all betray him and flee.
They cut and run.

Peter denies him three times, even when Jesus told him he would and he said he wouldn't, he did.

I don't know if you've ever made promises to God that you then broke. Well, Peter does just that because it's all about saving his own skin now.

The temple leaders had a committee meeting to decide whether they would kill God.

And that's what they did.

A little denial all the time.

And Jesus looks upon this crowd. He looks at Peter.

He looks at the people crucified to his left and his right.

He looks at the bystanders all gathered around him.

He looks at the soldiers that crucified him.

He looks at the whole system of all these people in denial about what they're actually doing.

In denial about their own lives, in denial about their reality.

And he still does what he came to do.

There's this great myth that we have to sort of get our lives right for God to love us,

that we have to sort of really muscle up the right kind of prayer or repentance

or say I'm sorry to God in the perfect way and really get our lives together before he will love us.

And it seems to me that Palm Sunday is one of those days where it's most clearly shown

that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were in complete denial and completely missing the point, God showed his love for us by giving himself up.

The miracle to me of this Palm Sunday we do every year,

this sort of whiplash from Hosanna to crucify,

is to show that for people like us who live often in denial,

ALD, ATT, this huge gap between where God is,

which is to say truth and reality,

and where we live with our fingers in our ears and blindfolds on,

pretending like everything's actually fine.

I'm doing all right.

In that gap, Christ stands to rescue us and to bring us into the land of light and truth and reality.

But even if we don't see that truth and light and reality,

He still does what He came to do.

Because His mission was not to kick out the Romans,

although they will eventually fall.

His mission was not necessarily to make the world a better place,

although His people did just that.

His mission was to show a world that doesn't get it that God loves them.

So I hope of all the characters in this story,

the one with whom you will identify today the most is the Centurion,

the one who's seeing this naked, broken man hanging humiliated on a cross,

and would say, truly, this man was God's son.
Amen.