

It's a period of life commonly known as "the terrible twos." According to the Mayo Clinic, two-year-olds are struggling with their reliance on their parents and their desire for independence. They're eager to do things on their own, but they're beginning to discover that they're expected to follow certain rules. The difficulty of this normal development can lead to inappropriate behavior, frustration, out-of-control feelings and temper tantrums. Tantrums are common during the second year of life, when language skills are starting to develop. Because toddlers can't yet say what they want, feel, or need, a frustrating experience may cause a tantrum. As language skills improve, tantrums tend to decrease.¹

I know parents who have taught sign language to their one and two-year olds in an effort to help with the communication breakdown. I have seen it work with a few of my friends' children. If children are given the tools to communicate their needs and their feelings, they are less likely to react with angry screaming, tears, and flailing limbs. Most rules that parents put in place for their children are for the safety and healthy development of the child. As we get older and become adults, we realize that sometimes the rules we are expected to follow aren't just. Sometimes the status quo is not something that should be tolerated. Sometimes a situation is so appalling and the powers-that-be refuse to make it right, that the situation calls for dramatic disruption.

Which brings us to our text this morning. The details of what has come to be called Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem or more commonly known as Palm Sunday, have great significance to the event itself and contributed to the deadly opposition Jesus faces only a few days later when he is arrested and executed for sedition against Rome. But since we are not first-century Jews, they can be easy to miss. First, the timing of this entry was significant for the Jewish people. Thousands of Jews from all over had gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. This holy-day celebrated the rebellion of the Hebrew slaves who were living under Egyptian oppression and the freedom from that oppression and exploitation. It was a celebration for which thousands

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/expert-answers/terrible-twos/faq-20058314>

upon thousands of people gathered in one place to remember a political uprising in which the ancestors of those gathered gained freedom from an oppressive ruling power.

Speaking of oppressive ruling powers, Rome knew that this day had the potential to spark rebellion and revolt. It was for this reason that Pontius Pilate, the Roman Prefect of Judea, had traveled from Cesarea Maritima to Jerusalem. In a show of force and power, Pilate's and his soldiers' visible military presence in the city served as both a deterrent to rebellion and as enforcers if a revolution began to take place.

In addition to the timing of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the very manner in which he enters provoked those in power, especially the religious leaders of the day. He rides on a donkey from the Mount of Olives in Bethpage [BEHT fuh fdzee] into Jerusalem amid shouts of "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Entering in this way intentionally imitated the way Solomon, the son of King David, rode the royal mule as part of his declaration of kingship 1,000 years earlier. It also served to fulfill a prophecy described in Zechariah which proclaimed "Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey." The crowds shouting Hosanna, waving palm branches, and laying down their cloaks to boldly proclaim Jesus as the true King and Lord of their lives. A king whose power does not come from force and strength but from compassion and love. They proclaim their devotion to a lowly carpenter from the backwater town of Nazareth and in doing so, they thumb their noses at the religious establishment as well as at Caesar and the political powers of the day. This was the signal of both a religious and a political uprising that set Jesus on the path toward the cross.

Jesus challenged the religious and cultural norms of the day to such a degree and with such vigor that those in power saw no other option than to put him to death. But Jesus wouldn't have been such a threat to the religious and political establishment had he been a lone voice. There were enough followers of Jesus entering the city that day and following him into the temple that the neither the Roman soldiers nor the religious authorities did not put a stop to it. These disciples and other followers caught a

glimpse of the kin-dom of God that Jesus sought to make a reality on earth. A kin-dom in which the hungry, the grieving, and the merciful are blessed. A kin-dom in which those who are usually rejected for being unclean or sinful or otherwise unfit for good company are the ones Jesus seeks out and proclaims God's love for them.

Jesus' fiercest anger was directed toward those who exploited others, especially in the name of God. His anger was especially directed toward those who prevented others from experiencing wholeness and connection. There were many people in the temple courts who sought to profit off the religious practices of faithful Jews during Passover. While some were surely taking advantage of the visitors to the temple, it would be unfair to characterize all the vendors and the money changers as corrupt or greedy. The services they provided were necessary for faithful Jews to properly practice their faith. But these very practices created a barrier to participation by those on the lowest economic rungs of society. I wonder if Jesus' anger wasn't at the vendors and the money changers themselves, but at the practices prescribed by religious leaders of the day which resulted in vendor and money changers profiting off of people's desire to worship God. For those on the margins of society who had to beg in order to eat, did not have the luxury of participating in these practices. With a holy and righteous temper tantrum, Jesus declares in no uncertain terms, that these barriers were no longer going to be tolerated.

A friend of mine's grandfather recently died. He and his family are currently in the process of sorting through his belongings and in the process are discovering so very interesting items. But one item in particular caught the eye of my friend so he took a picture and posted it on Facebook. It was the builder's development code for the neighborhood that was being built and to which his grandparents were going to move. Included in the code, between the rule about for how far back a detached garage must be from the property line and the rule against noxious or offensive activity during the construction process, were these words: "No race or nationality other than the white race shall use or occupy any building on any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race employed by an owner or tenant."

I knew codes like this existed. I knew that I shouldn't be surprised to read these words. Those of you who have been on this planet longer than me may even remember living in neighborhoods where these codes existed. But I think many of us, at least those of us who are part of the aforementioned "white race" forget how recent this was. This code was active for new construction in 1955 in Washington state. In fact, many of the neighborhoods in my friend's grandfather's city and I'm sure many cities across the country still have these codes on the books. They are no longer legally enforced but the damage of segregation continues to impact the wealth of and feeds the racism against people of color to this day. It was unjust laws like this in addition to many, many, others that got in the way of the wholeness and fullness of life of people of color. That attempted to deny them the justice and equality that is inherent in the kin-dom of God. And that led to the righteous and holy disruption of the Civil Rights movement, the speaking of truth to power, and eventually the assassination of Martin Luther King.

We are not naïve enough to think that oppression and injustice no longer exists. People continue to be marginalized, ignored, vilified, and oppressed for the benefit of those in power. I think this text asks us to consider who has been denied fullness of life? What barriers do we put in the way as individuals yes, but more importantly as a society, what barriers do we put in the way of people experiencing full and abundant life? What situations deserve to be met with flipping tables and courageous rebellion. What warrants righteous temper tantrum?

We also need to remember that Jesus' anger doesn't stay negative. Once the exploitation and distractions had been chased out, Jesus focused on restoration, on healing those in need. It wasn't enough for Jesus and it isn't enough for us to merely point out what is wrong. We must turn our condemnation into compassion and ultimately into action. So let us seek to disrupt, AND to heal. To tear down and then build up. To speak truth to power and to seek love for all. May it be so. Amen.