

Palm Sunday 2020

Three weeks ago, just after all the schools here had closed down,
I got a text, early in the morning, from our friend KJ Ha.

We've known KJ for ages;

his mom led the Korean congregation here for many years,

KJ's wedding was here in this church,

and now KJ runs a popular Tae Kwan Do studio here in town,
which makes us proud.

And this particular morning KJ was texting me a request.

"I'm doing all my classes now by Zoom," he said.

"And it would be more fun if I had a special guest with me in the studio.

Can you come down this morning?"

"And do Tae Kwan Do?" I texted back.

"It's just our morning stretch," he answered, reassuringly.

So I said yes.

I like KJ.

And, truth be told, I was really curious.

I wanted to find out what this whole Zoom thing was.

So I put on sweats, and headed down to the Sportsplex.

David came along for the entertainment.

When we got there, KJ's class had already assembled -
well, virtually, that is.

On a wide screen TV that KJ had connected to his laptop,

there were all these little picture boxes,

each one with an excited kid in it,

all waving to Master KJ.

It seemed really cool.

Even David, the technophobe, was fascinated.

And then it came time for class to begin.

KJ and I stood in the middle of the empty studio with the webcam aimed at us.

Morning Stretch time.

So to me, morning stretch means this: *Yawn* *Stretch* Okay, time for coffee.

That's NOT what it means to Master KJ.

We started with 30 jumping jacks.

I did all right with those. If we had stopped there, I would have been fine.

But no.

Now sit on the floor, he said. Put your feet apart and touch your forehead to the ground.

People do that? I had no idea.

KJ spoke to the kids up on the TV screen.

Class! he said — see if you can get your head closer to the floor than Reverend Alida.

Not much of a challenge.

As the “stretch” wore on,

there were more impossible tasks, plus a multitude of sit-ups and push-ups, which KJ did with one arm.

There was also a lot of kicking things, which I was better at.

And all the time, the kids up on the screen were having a lot of fun

laughing with each other, laughing **at** me,

and clearly just delighting in seeing their teacher in a place that they love.

So that was my first Zoom meeting.

I came out of there inspired — not to do more exercise — yeesh — but to set up my own little Zoom studio.

‘Cause it *did* look really cool to have a way to see everyone.

So out in the Barn, where our youth groups *should* be meeting now,

I've got a TV set up, like KJ did,

and I bought a camera just like KJ's,

and on Sundays and Tuesdays and Thursdays
 our youth groups are meeting up. Virtually.
 And it feels like the longer we're physically apart,
 the happier we all are to see each other up on the screen.
 We play games. We say prayers together.
 This week we met each other's pets on Zoom. And it's good.

But we miss each other, no way around it. We miss each other.
 I asked the teens on Thursday where they'd most like to go when this is
 done.

"I know this sounds crazy," said one, "but I really want to go to school."
 "And not just to see friends," said another, "There's *teachers* I really want to
 see."

Which is why I thought what happened last week was so lovely.
 You probably saw.

The teachers from one of our elementary schools in town
 all got in their cars and drove slowly around the streets near their school —
 just so the kids could see them.

The kids of the neighborhood stood on their front lawns
 and jumped up and down with excitement.
 On one of the videos, you can hear a child yelling,
 "there he is, there he is!" as their principal leads the parade down the street,
 grinning and waving from his sunroof.

Zoom meetings are great.
 But there are people that we are just longing to see.
 Longing to really see.
 Including, as it turns out, teachers. And principals.

I was thinking about this

when I was thinking about what it was like to be living in Jerusalem right around the year 33.

I was thinking about who you would have been longing to see then. Whom you would have been desperate to lay eyes on.

For the people of Jerusalem,
the person they were most anxious to see was someone
that most of them hadn't even met yet.

But they'd heard the stories.
They'd heard about the healings,
and the miracle,
and the hope, the hope he gave.

And they needed that hope.
You have to understand — things were really bad back then.
To live in Jerusalem meant to live in constant fear.
The Jews were living under occupation, Roman occupation.
God's people, who had been freed from slavery in Egypt centuries before,
were now no longer free.
Times were scary. The world seemed bleak.

But now there was word coming in from the countryside
of this man, this man named Jesus.
And this Jesus, he's telling people that the kingdom of God is coming.
He's telling people that with God all things are possible.

So the people of Jerusalem,
they are *longing* to lay eyes on this man,
they are longing to see for themselves
what hope looks like.
What hope looks like.

And it happens to be Passover time in the year 33,
so the streets of Jerusalem are full of people who have come to the Holy City
for the festival.

And on this particular day
a rumor begins to run through the crowds.
He's here.

The one we've been longing to see,
the one we've been just dying to lay eyes on,
he's here.

The Savior, the Hope-Giver, the Healer,
he's here.

And everyone, everyone, starts running to the main street of Jerusalem so
they can see him for themselves.

So they can finally see him.

And to make him welcome, they grab branches to wave,
and they start throwing their coats into the road to create a red carpet for
the Prince of Peace.

And then — there he is.

Making his way slowly up the street,
riding on a donkey.

There he is.

Finally they get to see him for themselves.

And oh, my goodness, they are so glad to see him.

And those people, those fear-filled, need-filled people of Jerusalem begin to
shout out to Jesus

Hosanna, Hosanna —

and what that actually means is “Save us!” “Save us!”

We're frightened, we're overwhelmed, they're saying.

Hosanna! Save us.

I've preached a lot of Palm Sunday sermons.
 But I have to say, this is the *first* Palm Sunday where
 I finally *get* what those folks back then felt like.
 That whole being frightened and overwhelmed thing —
 yeah, that's pretty much where we're at right now.
 Waving a palm and yelling "Hosanna, Save us!" —
 that feels about right.

We're pretty eager to lay eyes on a savior.
 We're pretty anxious to see a bringer of hope ,
 just like those folks in Jerusalem way back when.

So this story, this Palm Sunday story, it's our story right now.
 We're the ones looking for hope.
 We're the ones anxious to lay eyes on a bringer of hope.

And it turns out that the same guy who showed up for the people of
 Jerusalem two thousand years ago
 is still showing up for us now.
 The same Jesus who rode through the streets of Jerusalem,
 a sight for sore eyes,
 is the Jesus who now comes to us, each one of us.

We see him.
 We see him now.
 He has come to us to calm *our* fears.
 He has come to us to reassure.
 He has come to us to remind us that there is nothing we go through alone.

We see him.
 He is the bringer of hope.
 He is the companion on every journey.
 He is the light that shines in the darkness.

We see him.

We see the one who will hold our hands in the days ahead.

We see the one who will soothe our troubled spirits.

We see the one who will coax laughter from us,
and open our eyes to blessing.

We see him.

With our own eyes, we see him now,
among us now.

Hosanna! we say.

Save us.

And with his love, he does. *Amen.*