

April 10, 2022 From The City Gates To The Temple Steps  
Luke 19:28-48 Luke 21:19-26

This is Palm Sunday. And perhaps even of greater significance to us, it is the first Palm Sunday in 3 years that we have been able to worship, here in the sanctuary. There are things we need to remember. There are things we need to understand. And there are things we need to be reminded about.

One of the things we need to be reminded about is that Sunday was not a holy day in Israel when Jesus rode to the city gates and was met by the crowds. Sabbath (Shabbat) had ended at Sundown on Saturday. Sunday was the first day of the new week, and everything was open. And because it was the week leading up to the celebration of Passover, the air was filled with an atmosphere of celebration. Hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims, mostly Jews had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday season. But Sunday was not a day on the religious calendar.

Jesus' arrival changed that. The pilgrims and tourists have all heard about Jesus' ministry, HIS parables, the miracles. They hoped to catch a glimpse of this charismatic preacher-teacher, and perhaps to see something that would obviously touch their hunger for the presence, and their hope, for the Kingdom of God. And Jesus delivered. Everything HE did fulfilled prophecy concerning the Messiah. HE comes riding on the white colt. HIS followers are in the mood to celebrate. The

crowds rush to see and to participate. If Jesus is the Messiah, they are certain things are going to change.

The establishment is not impressed! The Romans do not like crowds and what we would call demonstrations. They watch it unfold. They are nervous. Is this a riot in the making? Will Jesus do something that precipitates insurrection? In this past year we have had a glimpse at how such things can and do occur even in our own country.

The Rabbinical Council, while not comfortable with the Romans and their rule, are just as uncomfortable about Jesus and the enthusiasm HE generates among the crowds. They are nervous because they know and understand the Romans are nervous. They want the peace kept. Their objection to what the disciples are saying and shouting is two fold. They see Jesus as a trouble maker with questionable religious motives. They are not comfortable with HIS popularity among the masses. They urge Jesus to rebuke HIS followers who are shouting about a King who comes in God's name. They know that could set off a powder keg, that would leave blood flowing in the streets. And we know Jesus replied, "If they keep silent, the stones will cry out."

If we learn nothing else from the Palm Sunday episode at the city gates we should recognize this: Jesus is convinced HE is the Messiah. Jesus is convinced that this is the beginning of the week that will end, with HIS experiencing excruciating physical pain, HIS blood being poured out, HIS life

being offered up to HIS heavenly Father, for the sins of one and all. HE sees it as inevitable. HE sees it as the reason for HIS existence, HIS coming into the world. And HE so loves us, the crowds that follow HIM, the religious establishment with which HE disagrees about so much, the Romans and the rest of the Gentile world, HE embraces every detail of what is happening, and surrenders HIS body, mind and Spirit, to the service of the Lord God Almighty.

It is evident to the Council, that Jesus has to be stopped. They try to trap him with questions that Jesus answers with baffling wisdom, that even gains him respect among the ranks of the priests. The question about paying taxes to the secular and clearly foreign authority was clumsy in its attempt to get Jesus to be critical of Rome. He deflects the question with a combination of wit and intelligence that once again reflects the reality, that HE and God are above such quibbling. "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God, that which is God's".

And it is so clearly obvious, Jesus believes the Council has little genuine heartfelt care about doing just that. They seek an accommodation. A compromise. Jesus is the ONE who is dealing with reality. Rome is the governing force. There is no question of that. The question is to whom have the members of the Council given their hearts, their souls, their very lives?

It is also obvious the Council has decided that Jesus is expendable. The problem is how to arrest HIM without inciting a riot? The problem is how to take HIM and silence HIM, when the people are so eager to hear HIM? To see HIM?

Palm Sunday sets the stage for the rest of the week, and everything that follows. Jesus is going to serve God in Jerusalem, in an uncompromising and radical fashion. In one of the great ironies of life, the religious Council will seek to stop HIM. And thereby they will serve the purpose of God, and the people, in a way they never have.

You see here is the hardest part for us to get our heads around. From Galilee to Jerusalem Jesus has said it time after time. HIS mission in life was to suffer and die to redeem us from sin. This is not the story of a tragedy. The Romans and the Council are not villains, which presumes there should have been another way, a way to keep Jesus from the cross. There is a line in Kelley Mooney's song Hallelujah set to the music of Leonard Cohen. "The holes in his hands and his feet and his side, Now in our hearts we know HE died, to save us from ourselves....Hallelujah!"

Deep down inside we know we need and needed saving. On Palm Sunday, God's plan to accomplish saving us moves toward the final moment. Jesus does not enjoy it. In fact HE suffers over it before it happens and as well as, in its playing out. How much does HE love us? How much does HE love you? Enough to do it. Caiaphas is not in charge. Judas cannot make a

profit. Pilate tries in vain to distance himself from the death of one who is innocent.

We are about to enter HOLY WEEK. On Thursday evening we will have the opportunity to gather and celebrate the Lord's Supper. On Friday we will mark the time, that represents the crucifixion as a matter of history. It happened. And what you have to remember through each of those events...and next Sunday when we celebrate the resurrection...is this: God so loved you, God so loved me, God so loved us all, that HE gave HIS only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in him, might not perish but have eternal life.

The Lord God was in charge. Is even in these chaotic times in which we are living where we get to see just how horrible, man can be to man. HE saved and saves us. In spite of our sin. No accommodation. No compromise. Love that will not let us go. HE does the one thing that meets darkness, the tempter, the demons and sweeps them back into the hole from which they came, to corrupt and steal souls. God loves you. Jesus redeems you. God, present in our world, got it done. The cross marks the place. And the cross of Jesus marks the time. Forever.

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father, our minds spin at the cost of our redemption. Our human nature wants to blame someone for an injustice, that HE who was innocent should have to suffer, and even die. Help us to recognize, because we find it hard to

recognize. This is about YOUR grace, YOUR loving us to a degree that we find hard to understand and even to except. We know we are not worthy, except that YOU say we are worthy, through the blood of Jesus. Barely comprehending, we praise YOUR name and give to YOU the glory and the praise. Amen