

4/14/2019

“Preparing”

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40

Sermon Series: With All Your Heart

Theme: We come to the end of our journey with Jesus in his earthly life. Returning to God with all our hearts has hopefully helped us as we prepare and participate in these final days of Lent.

Luke 19:28-40 (NRSV)

²⁸ After he had said this [a parable about the coming kingdom], he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “**Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!**”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

† **Like the people gathered in Jerusalem that first “Palm Sunday”, we may have different understandings, hopes, and expectations of who Jesus is.**

Whenever I read this or similar passages from the gospels, I am reminded of my trip to the Holy Land almost thirty years ago now. But I can still remember clearly the view out over the Kidron Valley, overlooking the east bank of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

I can’t remember exactly which day of our trip we entered Jerusalem for the first time, but I can remember the curiosity, anticipation, and excitement, because I knew this is the

way where Jesus had traveled nearly 2000 years before. I was even a bit anxious, because it was during the First Intifada – a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River. At any time, cars and buses could be blocked or diverted, because of protesters throwing rocks and stones, or by police and even army personnel trying to maintain and enforce order.

I could imagine what it was like for Jews in the time of Jesus under Roman occupation, with many of them longing for total independence again under the rule of a new king, while others were just trying to have some sense of safety and stability, keeping what order they did have under Roman occupation. And so, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, there were mixed feelings and reactions.

As Revs. Todd and Jennifer Pick put it:

“We emerge this week from our wilderness wanderings and find ourselves caught up in a parade, a party, a procession of palms! It has been a long journey to arrive at the gates of Jerusalem where Jesus will make his grand entry into the heart of political power and religious authority. We have not arrived here by chance. We have spent a considerable time remembering who we are and whose we are. We have spent weeks returning our hearts to the Heart of All Hearts.”

“As pilgrims on this Lenten journey, we have devoted the last five weeks to intentionally imitating Christ, repenting, coming together, and embracing the new thing that God is already doing within us and among us. It has been a season of turning our hearts to the One whose promises are bigger than the stars; a season of fasting from the things that harm, while feasting on grace. If we have walked the pathway in purposeful prayer and self-reflection, we discover that the very landscape of our hearts has been turned and cultivated. What was once a rocky desert is beginning to blossom with new and tender shoots. This season has hopefully reshaped our aching and broken hearts. The entire journey up until this point is what has prepared us—and our hearts—to enter these final days of Lent, to walk with Jesus, to remember his final days on earth, to endure the heartache and horror of death.”

As the Jewish people filled the city to celebrate the Passover -- remembering God’s liberating act of delivering the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt -- tension and anticipation would have been thick in the air. Many had prepared their homes and their hearts with hope, expectation and excitement. Many had heard of a new rabbi, a prophet, perhaps even the Messiah himself – Jesus of Nazareth. Could he and would he be the one to set them free from oppression? Would he restore health and life to those in Jerusalem as he had elsewhere?

Friends, as we come to this place and time in our Lenten journey this year, what are your questions, hopes, and expectations of Jesus? Maybe you know him and have witnessed his miraculous work in your life already. Maybe you still have doubts and want a better glimpse of him. Or maybe you are here to draw closer to him and follow him.

Or maybe you are here, because Jesus himself, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, has called you for a greater purpose.

† **Like those first followers (disciples) of Jesus, we may be called upon to share in God's plan and purpose of his life, death, and resurrection.**

Before reaching Jerusalem, the gospels tell us that Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead of him to one of the towns close by for the purpose of borrowing a donkey, to sit upon for his entry into Jerusalem. When its owners ask the two what they are doing, they answer as Jesus told them to: "The Lord needs it."

What has or might Jesus ask of you -- to do something a bit out of the ordinary, making you part of his plan and purpose? How is Jesus asking you to be part of his "triumphal entry" (declaring his Kingdom) on earth?

"After a cloak is spread over the colt and more are laid on the road, the simple parade begins. It's a procession of humility and gentleness. It's a demonstration of meekness and vulnerability. Instead of a big show of military might, Jesus defies expectations and comes in a different way. He doesn't rally the crowds to incite revolt. His coming invites in them the response of, '*Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven*' (Luke 19:29). As we hear an echo of the song of both the angels and Simeon at the beginning of Luke's gospel account (Luke 2), we have to rethink what kind of king is being blessed here: one who comes ultimately to bring about God's peace." (ibid.)

As you may have noted, there is something missing from this entrance parade of Jesus as Luke tells it . . . palms. Instead of waving signs of victory, of paradise, of the fertile ground of new life, Luke emphasizes instead the act of spreading cloaks on the ground. Here we have an act of deep reverence and subservience. As we are lifting up and waving our palm branches, perhaps there is a complementary action of laying down that needs to occur. (ibid.)

Todd and Jennifer Pick ask some thoughtful questions of us.

"As we are preparing to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday next week, by lifting up our shouts of praise on this Palm Sunday, might we also lay down ways of living that do not honor God, our neighbor, and all life around us?"

“As we lift up our voices crying out for an end to injustice and suffering, might we also lay down our lives, allowing Christ to fill them with humility and the new beginnings of hope? As we lift up our palms with songs to bless the One who comes in peace, might we also lay down the superficial cries of victory and triumph? As we lift up our eyes to see a vision of earth and heaven made one, might we also lay down our expectations of how God will change us and our world; of how God will come into our lives to accomplish this?

“As we lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, might we also lay down our hearts, until they burn with the desires of God’s heart? And in our lifting up and laying down, God might just weave us into a tapestry of resurrection.” (ibid.)

† **With the same “mind” that was in Christ Jesus, we can have faith and assurance in God’s transforming power and love.**

As we look forward to the events in the life of Jesus to be remembered this week, remember the words of the Apostle Paul to the believers in Philippi . . .

Philippians 2:5-11

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Friends, the triumphant parade with shouts of joy and blessing will cause our hearts to rise and swell to the highest of highs. Yet the excitement of the boisterous parade where Jesus is accepted by the crowds will fade, and our hearts will slip to the depths of despair as Jesus is rejected.

Holy Week brings us to a space and a time for lament, for struggle, for sorrow. Time slows, and we will walk through betrayal and unanswered prayer into darkness and death. Thankfully, we have done the work to prepare our hearts to walk from the procession to the table, from the cross to the stone-cold tomb.

Today, as we celebrate the entry of Jesus into the holy city of Jerusalem and into our lives, the story continues. We have prepared our feet to follow its path with a hope that is

stronger than despair, a light that is stronger than darkness, and a love that is stronger than death. Thanks and praise be to our God!!!

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Questions for Reflection:

How have you been preparing for the observance of Holy Week?

How is Jesus asking you to be part of his “triumphal entry” (declaring his Kingdom) on earth?

What might the Spirit be moving you to “lay down” before the Lord?