



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 19:28-44
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The Lord Has Need of It

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

A week ago, I planned to take a week off from our study of Luke for our elders report. Normally I preach on something that is relevant to our report and our vision as a church. But today is special not only because it's our elders report but because it's Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week and it's the day we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It hit me on Tuesday that this is exactly where we are in the Gospel of Luke, which is chapter 19:28ff. That's amazing because I didn't plan it that way! I thought to myself, "I can't pass up an opportunity to preach on the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday!" But I still had no idea how Palm Sunday related to our elders report and the vision of our church. But then I read it and I realized that this was the perfect passage for our elders report. Do you know why? Maybe if I read it that will help.

"After He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you shall say, "The Lord has need of it."' So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord has need of it.' They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. As soon as He was approaching, near the

descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: 'BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' But Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!' When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation'" (Luke 19:28-44).

Someone has called Palm Sunday a "day of temporary triumph." That's an indication of the way in which this day leaves us with a sense of ambivalence. It begins with joy and praise. It ends with Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. What can we say about this first day of Holy Week that is helpful for us as a church body?

I. His arrival was greeted with joyful praise.

Some people have called this a day of applause. Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time. Many scholars believe that he actually planned his own parade. Up until now, he had carefully avoided publicity.

Now he seemed to reach out for it. It was Passover time. The city was jammed with pilgrims from all over the world. He entered Jerusalem in a way that would focus the whole city on his arrival.

He seemed to know beforehand how that would happen. He told two of his disciples to go into a nearby village where they would find a donkey that had never been rode. They were to say to the owner of the beast, "*The Lord has need of it.*" That man must have known the Lord, otherwise he might have responded, "So what's it to me?" The donkey was a noble beast in that culture. Generals and kings rode a horse only when they went to war. But when they wanted to come in peace, they rode a donkey. I'm sure Jesus knew that he would be fulfilling the prediction of the prophet Zechariah who said that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (Zech. 9:9). Jesus was identifying himself as the Messiah, but he was also saying what kind of Messiah he would be. He would be gentle and humble. This king would not conquer with power and pomp, but with meekness.

And the people loved it. Other gospel writers emphasize the role of the crowds, but Luke emphasizes the role of the disciples. He says "*the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God, joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen.*" Blind eyes could see again. Lameness surged with vitality and strength. Demons fled from his presence. A dead man came forth from the tomb after three days. All of these hopes and dreams converged in this one grand procession of joyful worship centered around the person of Jesus.

It strikes me that as a church this is what we're all about. We're all about this Jesus, who we call King. We're all about him who conquers hearts and conquers the world not through the power of the sword but through the power of his humble love. We want to be among that crowd of follower-disciples who "praise God joyfully with a loud voice." We want

that crowd of disciples to grow larger and to deepen in their love for him. We want to be part of that rowdy parade, not just through Jerusalem, but through the San Francisco Peninsula. We are unabashedly a Christ-centered church. We will worship him. We will serve him. We will obey him. We will proclaim him. And we will wait for him to return.

The great Swiss-German theologian Karl Barth delivered one of the last lectures of his life at the University of Chicago. At the end of the lecture, the president of the seminary told the audience that Dr. Barth was very tired, and could not handle the strain of answering too many questions. So he said, "I'll ask just one question on behalf of all of us. Of all the deep insights you have ever had, which is the greatest?" This was a quite a question to ask a man who had written thousands of pages of the most sophisticated theology ever put on paper. The students sat with pads and pencils ready. Barth closed his eyes and thought for a while. Then he smiled and said, "The greatest insight that I've ever had is this: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!'" That's what we want to be all about as a church. That should be the greatest thing to us. But we know that not everyone will like that message.

II. His arrival was questioned by his enemies.

Notice in this story some of the religious leaders objected to what was going on. So they told Jesus to rebuke his disciples. It's a reminder to us that Palm Sunday was the beginning of the end. Public approval would stop here. As the week unfolds, you will see that it's downhill all the way to Good Friday. The fickle crowd would turn on him. A deadly coalition of Jewish and Roman leaders would take shape and their plans would culminate with Jesus hanging on a cross.

I wish I could say it was all about those self-righteous Pharisees and the fickle crowd, but even the joyful praise of these disciples would soon turn to pathetic denials. A betrayer was already among the Twelve. In a few days, as Jesus sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane, the other 11 disciples snored, having

promised to watch and pray. And despite Peter's own vow to die with his Master, when push came to shove, his heart went limp and he said, "I never knew the man."

It reminds us that if we really endeavor as a church to make and mature more followers of Christ, we'll always do it amidst opposition. That opposition will come from those outside the faith and those within our own ranks. Some of that opposition will even come from within our own hearts. We're in a battle. We battle our own sinful nature which bends us towards evil. We battle a world system that's antithetical to Christ-centered living. We battle an invisible enemy who is cunning and deceitful. Scripture calls him "the god of this world" and a "roaring lion, seeking for someone to devour." We mustn't forget that. Our job is not to be popular, but to be faithful. If we become popular, we might need to rethink what we're doing. We thank God for growth and success, but we mustn't become seduced by it. Perhaps most of all, it's a reminder that without him we can do nothing. We're sheep in the midst of wolves and we need to keep crying out to him who alone can deliver us and cause his word to spread.

III. His arrival was accompanied with tears.

Not only was his arrival greeted with joyful praise and questioned by his enemies, but it was accompanied by tears. There are only two incidents in the gospels where Jesus wept. He wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, and he wept here over Jerusalem because he saw it as a place of lost opportunity. He, the Messiah, had come. He had taught and healed but they never bought into it. So he announces a prophecy of Jerusalem's doom which came about to the letter in 70 AD when the city was under siege and the temple was leveled. Even today those haunting words stand over a Jerusalem which relies more on guns than God, "If only you had known the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes."

A person can say things like that in two different ways. You can say it with vengeance or you can say it with tears. Jesus said it with tears. It's like the story I heard about

a little girl named April. She had spent most of the years of her young life in foster homes. As a result she had retreated more and more into a world of fantasy. She finally landed in a home run by an elderly couple who had 15 foster children. They took the children because of the extra income they provided. They were hard and demanding and sometimes cruel to the children. April found her saving grace in a world of fantasy where she made up little tunes and songs. She pretended to write her songs down and put them in an envelope and mail them to someone. Her foster parents were afraid she was actually writing down bad things about them and so they forced her to stop. For a while she did stop, but then one day April was back at it and her foster mother saw her write something on a piece of paper. When she finished she put it in an envelope and walked out into the yard, climbed a tree and put the letter between two limbs. When she had left the foster mother immediately called the father and had him climb up that tree to get the letter. He got the note and handed it to his wife. She opened the letter and read it. It said, "Whoever finds this note—I love you."

That's the spirit in which Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. He reached out and said, "I love you" but he wept because they wouldn't respond. And that's the spirit in which we reach out to a sometimes hostile world. We say, "He loves you." And when they reject our message, we don't scold them but we weep over them.

IV. His arrival demands our response.

People are still missing that opportunity. Some of US are still missing that opportunity. So what do we do about it? Perhaps the most arresting phrase in this story is the crisp sentence, "*The Lord has need of it.*" He needed a beast of burden to ride on as he entered the city. The owner was simply told "The Lord has need of it." He didn't get an explanation. He didn't get to take a security deposit. He didn't copy their driver's license. It's easy to read a story like this and just pass over the disruption that Jesus created in this man's

life. Come to think of it, he was always doing things like that. It's like the story in the Gospel of Mark, where these people bring a friend of theirs to Jesus to be healed, but the house is full and they can't get in to see him. So what do they do? They rip a hole in the roof and lower him down by a rope! Jesus talks with the guy and heals him. Great! How wonderful is his faith! But no one seems to ask the owner of the house about this. The Lord had need of the roof, but did they ever fix it?

The needs are no less today. Just how disruptive will we let our faith become? What will we do when we sense that the Lord has need of something? There are people who need our love and our help. I'm happy to say that this church is doing a lot to help people. We have people feeding the homeless each month in our Bags of Love ministry. We have people building houses with Habitat for Humanity. We have people supporting children all over the world through World Vision. Hundreds of meals are made each year for folks who are sick or grieving. Missionaries in Albania, Bangkok, and Africa depend on our prayers and support.

But how far are we willing to go? What will we do if it occurs to us that the Lord needs, not a donkey to ride into town on, but adequate housing for people who can't afford it? What will we do? What will we do if it becomes clear to us that the Lord has need of your two week vacation to send you on a mission trip to South America? What would we do? How far would we go? What would happen if the Lord needed you to teach a Sunday School class of four year olds 50 Sundays a year?

CONCLUSION

You see, the question that challenges us as a church from this passage is: Do we have anything that the Lord has need of and that we are willing to put to use for him? On the one hand, we might say, "Well,

the Lord doesn't need anything at all. I mean, he's the Lord. He doesn't need me. He doesn't need anything." That may be true, but that's not the way he chooses to work. The wonder of God is that he chooses to use what we offer him to accomplish his work in this world. We're his hands and his feet. Does he have need of your spiritual gifts? Does he have need of your money? Does he have need of your time? Of course he does. So there are really two humiliations of God in the gospel. There's the humiliation of God becoming a man, and not just a man but a man who endured scorn and mistreatment. But there's also the humiliation of God choosing to need ordinary people like you and me. It's the humiliation of God saying, "*The Lord has need of it.*" And the question is, are we willing to offer it to him?

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