

Luke 19:29-42 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 said. 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." ⁴¹ As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Luke 19:29-42

04/10/2022 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"The Week that Rocked the Earth"

Rev. Amy Terhune

A little boy named Billy was visiting his grandmother in California for a week one summer and almost wore her out with his vigorous activity. She was accustomed to living a peaceful, orderly life. But Billy was perpetually in motion – ever curious, ever into anything and everything, ever leaving a mess in his wake. One night when they were both sound asleep, there was an earthquake. The grandmother was awakened by the house shaking, and concerned that Billy might be frightened, called out, "Billy, Billy!"

Imagine her surprise when Billy yelled back, "I didn't do it, grandma!" [2 ¶s from Brett Blair, illustrations for Palm Sunday, www.Sermons.com.]

Few of us have the power to rock the earth. But this week, we follow the steps of one who did.

I would say that today it begins, and many of you would probably understand what I mean even if it's not entirely accurate. It actually began in Bethlehem some 33 years before. God became flesh. Angels sang. Shepherds came to worship. Magi from distant lands bore gifts. But then, aside of a few vague references to Herod's threats and the 12-year-old Jesus listening to rabbis at the temple, God-in-the-flesh sort of disappears into obscurity for about 30 years. Until he suddenly emerges, is baptized, tempted in the wilderness, and then takes to the road for three years teaching, healing, redeeming the broken and challenging the bigwigs.

Just before our lesson today opens, Jesus heals Bartimaeus and restores the honor of Zacchaeus in Jericho. Now Jericho is a beautiful, temperate oasis town about 800 feet below sea level located right on the Dead Sea at the head of Elisha's spring. It's also only a day's walk from the capital city of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem is 2500 feet above sea level, and though it's only about 15 miles southwest, it's through rocky, arid, scorching uphill climb through the wilderness. From Jericho, Jesus can do one of two things. He can ride north along the Jordon River Valley north to Galilee—to home, comfort, familiarity. He can do the occasional healing, preach in the fields or on a grassy mountainside, and ultimately amount to nothing more than an eccentric, slightly kooky prophet with a pretty nifty skill set.

Or he can ride out of Jericho and head south—uphill through that furnace-like desert to Jerusalem, to the bright lights of the big city, the seat of power, the big leagues in both religious and state politics. He could go and start a revolution, make a name for himself, endear himself to the crowds, throw off Rome. And it sure does look like that's what he's doing. I mean, his entrance into Jerusalem has Zachariah 9 written all over it! If he's seeking to make a public declaration of Messianic proportions, he did it. Donkey, palms, hosannas—this is how the Messiah is supposed to make an entrance.

And he's come to start a revolution alright, but it's just that it wasn't the revolution the people wanted. It's not what they were looking for. He didn't come to spill Roman blood. He came to spill his own. He came to revolutionize the relationship between humankind and God. He came to rock the earth.

Commentator Scott Hoezee asks, "What if the gospel story ended with Palm Sunday? ...After all that the disciples had been through, and with their own secret hope that Jesus would be a political success on whose coattails they would ride to prominence, the disciples looked at the Triumphal Entry and thought, "Now this is more like it!" They probably wanted to capture and bottle that festive atmosphere in much the same way Peter did when he wanted to build shrines at the Transfiguration. So also on Palm Sunday: if they could have hit the pause button on the remote control of life, this would have been a wonderful image to freeze frame.

"The problem is that there is no salvation for anyone on Palm Sunday. The people cried "Hosanna," which means "Save us!" But a parade doesn't save...

And maybe at this time of war and carnage, of terror and multiple threats of violence all around us, maybe we preachers don't need to work very hard to convince anyone of this point. If we look back upon history, we see that human sin has resulted not in one long string of happy parades but rather in a series of calamities, one long and sad parade of terror and sorrow. Instead of a festive throng, history shows us things like the Trail of Tears on which Native Americans tramped into exile. History shows us boat-loads of Africans in chains, taken from their native country and sailed half way around the world to be paraded before potential buyers, not of their services, but of their very lives. History shows us long lines of Jews marching not in some victory parade but shuffling along toward Nazi gas chambers in Auschwitz. History shows us the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the death squads of Rwanda and Sierra Leone. And now atrocities along roadsides Ukraine. These are the real parades of human history. [3 ¶s from Scott Hoezee, Comments and Observations, illustrations for Palm Sunday, www.Sermons.com.] I don't have to look further than my own TV screen this week to know how desperately we need saving or how little we understand of the things that make for peace.

And so, Jesus looks down upon the city and weeps for it. Why? Dr. J. Howard Olds notes that, "...there are two words in the Bible for weeping. One is dakruó – it's silent weeping, perhaps just a trickle of a tear down your cheek. That was the word used last week to describe how Mary weeps as she anoints Jesus' feet with spikenard. The other is klaió – the eruption of the soul in brokenness. It's a wailing lament. And it is the second word that is used here..." [adapted from "The Door of Celebration" by Dr. J. Howard Olds, www.Sermons.com, and from Strong's Greek-English Lexicon at www.biblehub.com.]

That seems to suggest that Jesus doesn't just suppress a sniffle as he rides into the city. The emotions he feels are tearing him up inside, and they come spilling out in a torrent of passion.

Obviously, his tears are ones of grief. Jerusalem. In Hebrew, Ya-ru-shalom – it means "God is our peace." And yet, Jesus weeps because they don't know the things that make for peace. They don't recognize the presence of God. He weeps, and the disciples sing, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" They sing of peace while they prepare for a revolutionary war.

But we know how it goes. Before the week is out, the disciples will fall silent. The King's coronation will be a crown of thorns and a cross for a throne. Kingship will be his crime. The crowds will clamor for his crucifixion. The leaders will scoff, the soldiers will mock, the onlookers will laugh. Jesus will shed blood instead of tears. And the tears will be left to Mary and Martha and Magdala and Suzanna and Johanna and Salome and others. Peace will abandon them all.

Beth Quick gets to the truth of it when she writes, "I've always thought that Jesus got himself crucified because he refused to be the kind of Messiah the people expected him to be. They wanted a revolutionary, didn't they? Someone who would come in and free the Jews from Roman occupation. Someone who could be a grand king in the line of David, their favorite king in their history. I thought that they just didn't get what kind of Messiah Jesus was saying he was. I thought it was a case of mistaken identity... But if this were the case, wouldn't they realize that Jesus was not responding in the way they had hoped? If Jesus wasn't the Messiah they were looking for, couldn't they just ignore him? Couldn't they just let him fade out of focus? Why did they act with such violence? Why was there no voice – no voice – standing up as an advocate for Jesus?"

"The more I think about it, the more I mull over the events of Jesus' life in my mind, the more convinced I become that ... they knew, and we know, exactly who Jesus is... After all, Jesus is only a threat, a real threat, if he is who he claims to be – the Messiah, the one anointed to bring good news, preach repentance, and announce that God's kingdom already is... It is because we believe him that he frightens us.

"If Jesus is the Messiah, then we really are supposed to love our enemies, count all the world as our neighbors. If Jesus is the Messiah, then we really are called to give up the material things that we call treasures, and trade them for treasures of a different kind. If Jesus is the Messiah, then we really are supposed to go where God calls us, follow where God leads, no matter how inconvenient it is, how difficult, how painful. If Jesus is the Messiah, we must relinquish the freedom to hate, to covet, to lead, to own, to control. We like change that excites us, but not change that requires hard work, internal shifts, sweat, toil, and sacrifice. Yet if Jesus really is the Messiah, then we've got to change. And nothing terrifies us more. [3 ¶s adapted from Palm/Passion Sunday Meditation by Beth Quick, <http://bethquick.blogspot.com/2010/03/sermon-for-palmpassion-sunday-palms-and.html>.]

Regarding this passage, Jessica LaGrone offers the following insight: "If God had only met our expectations, how small would the Kingdom be? If the kind of king we anticipated had begun to rule, wouldn't that have been just as short lived a Kingdom as that of any other earthly king, surrounded by wealth and glory and power for just as long as a single human life could grasp those things? Instead we have this unexpected king, his final throne a cross, his final words a proclamation of forgiveness, his final act one that rocked the earth, changed the world, and ensured this Kingdom would never end. [adapted from Jessica LaGrone "Lent 6: God Moves...To The Cross" in *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series*, Vol. 1 (Jessica Miller Kelley, ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016) pg.200-201.] Amen.