

Sermon
April 3, 2020 Palm Sunday

Covenant Presbyterian Church
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Mixed Emotions
Luke 19:28-46

Every Spring we center our worship on one of the gospels. This year we have been looking closely at passages from the Gospel of Luke. As we begin Holy Week together in the midst of a pandemic and all the uncertainty surrounding it Luke provides a unique view of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. There are parts of the story as told in the other gospels that are absent from Luke's version. There are no palm branches waved, no shouts of Hosanna by children or references to the son of David. And that is our reality this day. We are not able to be part of a parade of palms down the center aisle of the church shouting Hosanna in the Highest! We miss it, don't we?

The other gospels emphasize the crowds that accompanied Jesus even saying that crowds come out of Jerusalem to meet him. No crowds together today. But the emphasis in Luke is on the disciples being his companions although it clearly was more than just the twelve apostles. These were his traveling companions.

One other thing that struck me on our passage is the range of emotions presented. First, think about the disciples. The two disciples who were sent to get the colt were amazed at Jesus' knowledge. For the colt was just where they were told he would be and the owners responded just as Jesus had said they would. Surely they must have been thinking Jesus is always one step ahead of us! And as they began the downward descent from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem their hearts were hopeful that maybe now Jesus would be recognized for who he was and all Jerusalem would name him King. Even as they praised God with the powerful words of Psalm 118 as all those entering Jerusalem did they added the words "the king" to their praise naming their hopes. The one who was to come in the name of the Lord became "*the king who comes in the name of the Lord*". And Luke adds the phrase

“Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven.” They proclaim a king that comes bringing peace and yet their very praise of God that day caused the Pharisees that were accompanying them to try to silence them.

The Pharisees in their midst were like spies accompanying Jesus and his disciples waiting and watching to see what they could report back to their leaders. Or a security detail trying to keep the peace during a holiday. Luke is the only gospel to mention the Pharisees words. Their role might have been to be sure nothing got out of hand after all Jesus and his followers needed watching. Their words to Jesus reveal that they were anxious and concerned by what the disciples were saying and by Jesus’ riding into Jerusalem. They wanted Jesus to order the disciples to stop before their actions caused trouble with Rome. After all the Pharisees and the scribes along with the Chief Priest were those who kept Rome at bay by controlling the Jews.

The disciples were amazed and excited, hopeful that now was the time. The Pharisees were cautious and anxious. But what about Jesus? When we read this entire passage we discover that Jesus experienced a whole range of emotions on this day as well. The day unfolds in three scenes.

In the first and most familiar scene we sense a resolve in Jesus. The time has come. He made preparations and knew what he had to do. He had been telling the disciples this day would come. He hoped he had prepared them adequately. But regardless the time had come. Jesus set things in motion and allowed the disciples to have a few moments of joy as he fulfilled the prophecies of Zechariah. Even when the Pharisees tried to stop him we hear the resolve in Jesus’ voice as he said *“I tell you, if these were silent”* - if the disciples weren’t praising God for all the deeds of power he had done - Jesus knew that *“the stones would shout out.”* For the time had come. There was nothing anyone could do to stop what was to come. Jesus was on the road to Calvary.

It is similar to the role that health care experts are in now. They saw this virus coming as it

began in other countries but talking about why we didn't heed the signs earlier here is not helpful except in what we can learn from it for the future. We sense their resolve in that they see their role as one of education and being part of helping us to deal with what is coming. For the virus is here now. All we can do is live through it and try to prepare the world in the best way possible. For us that means to limit contact with other human beings - to shelter in place - and to provide what is needed to care for those who are sick. For Jesus it meant letting the disciples have their moment of proclaiming God and acknowledging what he had done for them.

As Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem he began to weep. There are only two times in scripture when we are told Jesus wept. When he saw Mary and Martha and they told him Lazarus had died and here outside the city of Jerusalem. His compassion and care for Mary and Martha brought him to tears. In the same way his compassion for his disciples, for the entire Jewish nation and for the city that embodied their faith caused him to weep. He wept for what might have been. If only they had recognized and understood his message. His grief was real.

His words are the words of a lament. Fred Craddock noted in his commentary on Luke that "A lament is a voice of love and profound caring, of vision of what could have been and of grief over its loss, of tough hope painfully releasing the object of its hope, of personal responsibility and frustration, of sorrow and anger mixed, of accepted loss but with energy enough to go on." (Interpretation: Luke; Westminster-John Knox Press, p. 229) Jesus' tears and grief remind us of the depth of his love for the world and his deep compassion for the pain that so many would encounter in the days to come. And they reveal that he understands our pain and grief for he too felt it.

These are some of the mixed emotions we feel today. For many of us there are tears and deep grief for all we have lost. Jesus wept over the city just as we weep for all those who are infected, those who have died and their loved ones who cannot mourn in public. We weep for all the dreams

and experiences that people will miss this spring because of this pandemic. We grieve for the families who are struggling and whose lives will be forever changed because of this virus. We feel compassion for all those who have lost jobs, can't pay their bills or provide for their families and are frightened by what lays ahead. The grief is real and we weep for our world just as Jesus wept for his.

The final scene reveals that Jesus not only rode into Jerusalem but his first stop was at the Temple. What he witnessed there caused him to express his anger in a way we don't often see Jesus react for it told him how far so many were from God's intentions. The money changers in the temple were more concerned for their own profits and gains than for the needs of the people to pray. Some of Jesus' anger and frustration might also have been a recognition that nothing would stop this way of life short of sacrificing his own life. Why, oh why, did it have to come to this?

In the midst of this pandemic we too feel this depth of anger toward those who are not taking this pandemic seriously. For those who are not following the guidelines and seeking to help others while those who are caring for the ill are willing to sacrifice their very lives for others. We can't go out into the streets to confront these individuals but many are taking to the airways to express their frustrations and to remind everyone of the dangers. These feelings are natural - for even Jesus felt them at this moment.

But the next verse tells us that once Jesus expressed his anger and frustration he got up the next day and went back into the Temple to teach. He did not dwell on his anger or his grief for his first and most important task was to prepare the people for what was to come. To teach them all he could. He worked his way through these mixed emotions and then focused on the future seeking to prepare the disciples for what was to come.

And so this Holy Week with the mix of emotions we are feeling in this time of crisis we have a unique opportunity to work our way through the mixed emotions of these events and to learn from

Jesus' teachings. Confined to our homes we can reflectively read scripture remembering what Jesus and his disciples experienced and felt as this week progressed. To help us a guided reading of scripture will be sent out this week by email and posted on our Facebook page so that together we can reflect on these events of the last week of Jesus' life and its meaning for our lives. For remember, we are being prepared for what is to come. And so, my friends, in the mix of emotions we feel remember that Sunday is coming! Thanks be to God!