

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“A Perspective from Palm Sunday”

Luke 19: 28-40

April 1, 2007

Everything belongs... every part of any story matters... every part of any life. That's why we as Christians pay attention – careful attention to the life of Christ. Every part, especially during this week, is important. To lose any one thing... to not pay attention to, not observe one part, changes what is being experienced and what is being understood.

It's a whole... It's a story... and if you take away one part of it you may not be telling the right story... or telling the story “right.” You can't do Easter without Good Friday... or Good Friday without Maundy Thursday. And you have to have a Palm Sunday, this day when we remember that Jesus showed up in Jerusalem.

It's like watching the last 60 seconds of a great comeback in the Final Four... you really aren't going to understand the significance of things when the guy stands on the ladder and cuts the net and hangs a piece of it around his neck unless you watched the entire game, or better yet, the entire season... or perhaps his entire career. Something unfolds... or is unveiled.

It's always happening... the unfolding

God reveals... In those trees outside turning green.

In the roses blooming on the wall outside behind me...

God reveals... In the story of human history...

And in your history...

And in your heart.

God reveals in sacred writings...

And through Holy persons...

And through a Holy people.

But what we believe, what we believe most uniquely as Christians, is that in the fullness of time God is revealed most clearly in this one called Jesus... and through his story.

From Bethlehem's Manger to Bethany's Ascension... the Divine is being opened up to us. The whole thing matters. And so we listen and look... and especially as the story climaxes in this Holy Week which begins with Palm Sunday. Something important is being revealed. This day is a theophany... a sacred showing. In fact, that's why a donkey-never-ridden was used.

The ancients would understand that whole “donkey-never-ridden thing” as a big sacred hint... **HEADS UP Y'ALL. Something that is happening here has sacred significance.** It's not just an incidental entrance or just the next thing Jesus did. There is something sacred unfolding and, best we can, we want to understand it.

That's what disciples do, they understand their master. And Luke is careful to say that those gathered along the road into town were “disciples.” And he says this in contrast to the other gospels... In those versions, this is a semi-hysteric, perhaps selfish...

certainly fickle mass of humanity who will be screaming **“Give us Barrabas”** in just a few short days.

As Luke tells it, they are disciples...

Those called and convicted...

Those who've already walked the aisle and said yes.

Those who understand... or... at least, would like to.

Luke writes about disciples and to disciples... to the Church hoping that they, that we, will understand the sacred significance of this part of the story.

One thing seems clear we are to see... Jesus goes into Jerusalem intentionally. Does it seem too simple? Too obvious to bother saying?

That Jesus is not being ushered along...

By some events or wave of momentum.

Or by religious leaders or political zealots...

Or by some agenda of the ego...

Jesus says “Yes” to this moment. And it's one Yes that was preceded by a million others, which is probably always the case, right! When we arrive at life's big moments we can say yes to them because we've said so many other small yeses.

Jesus had! Luke said a while back, **“He set his face towards Jerusalem,”** meaning, **“Yes... I'll go there.”**

And he knows what it means, even if he wasn't a mystic by this point and clearly seeing beyond the material realm... Anyone paying attention knows that if he shows up in Jerusalem, it's not likely that it's going to end well. Jesus could see the handwriting on the political wall... But I think he can also see what will take place.

Maybe not every detail ...

Maybe not even most of them ...

But he has one foot in eternity ...

and he is aware of it.

We all do (by the way – have one foot in eternity)... we are amphibious creatures... made from the dust of the ground and the breath of God. Made from and for Heaven and Earth. Made to function in both realms... it's just that we don't tend to be so aware of that... and do it well at all.

Jesus was aware... so, he has one foot in eternity... Where time isn't... Present and future are sort of layered on top of one another and Jesus can see. That's how come he can say to his disciples **“Go into town and you will see a donkey never ridden, take it. And when you're asked, just say, ‘the Lord has need of it.’”**

It's a little moment in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) that hints at the spiritual level at which Jesus is operating. But even more importantly, it shows us how deliberate and intentional about this he was.

He plans this out... carefully. **“Go get me a donkey.”** He is attending to the meaning and significance of this moment. And he deliberately enters Jerusalem in this prophetic way... On a donkey... preaching with this ride into town that something of significance is taking place.

It stirs up the people... and Jesus doesn't avoid this. He lets it happen. As careful as he's been about the whole crowd thing... often avoiding them... often trying to downplay any hype. He doesn't here.

He doesn't slip into town under the cover of darkness like he could have.

He doesn't disguise himself as a Passover tourist.

He doesn't shush anyone.

In fact, when some folks complain that everyone is calling him King and suggest to him that he shut them up, Jesus says that he couldn't if he tried... **"If the people don't shout the rocks will."** What's eternally true always finds its way into life... Eternal into the temporal.

He's deliberate. On Sunday, he sets Friday's outcome in motion. **"I'm laying down my life... no one is taking it from me."** He knows... He goes.

I'm not suggesting that as a human being he didn't feel some anxiety about this moment, or this week. Who knows all he was thinking and tempted to think. **"Maybe at the last minute this cup can pass from me... I've glimpsed the future but maybe there are multiple futures."** Who knows what crossed his mind...

But he let go of it...

And he rode into Jerusalem...

And on into the climax of this redemptive story.

Where the Author of life will die.

So... Paul would write that **"Though in his very nature he was God, he doesn't cling to that... but he empties himself... He makes himself nothing."**

It's a very important verse to hear on this day. And one, by the way, written just some 20 or so years after this took place. The Apostle Paul, this monotheistic Jew, has a hold of a very cosmic and controversial truth, doesn't he. **"Jesus, is in his very nature, God."** But doesn't cling to that...

The one who is "all in all," becomes, Paul says, **"Nothing."** It's unimaginable. Think about hearing this in a world where the Greek gods are jealous and compete with one another and use humanity for their own selfish purposes. Paul, by revelation, has a peek at what the Divine really is. What that nature is really like.

The Divine nature has no need to cling.

The Divine empties... Becomes nothing for our sakes.

Humbled... **Paul says. Humbled.**

"Look at this," Paul is saying. **"See what God is like."** God is not pre-occupied with self. God doesn't wake and wonder whether or not anyone down here is upset with him. God isn't looking to us to make him whole or to take care of him. God isn't offended that I haven't noticed him. God doesn't withhold something because He's been wounded.

He doesn't do all the stuff we do... (and by the way... often project onto God). God isn't like us.

God doesn't cling... not to status... not to position... to power. God is Love and Love empties itself. It's always ecstatic... Always going out of itself... And if all that wasn't clear enough in creation and in history and in the teachings of the Tradition. In the fullness of time... This Loving, unclinging, self-emptying, self-denying nature... was made in human likeness...

A baby in a manger... crying he did make.

A boy in the streets of Nazareth...

Playing... falling down, getting up.

Growing... playing some more... learning.

A young man... enjoying his life.

Wondering about his life...

Searching and struggling and discerning.

One who is learning to say no, no, no.

So he can say yes, yes yes.

He comes to know more and more of who he is... and whose he is. And he lives from that deep awareness. He teaches and cares. He restores... He preaches and provokes... He serves... blesses.

And eventually, this emptied one, who reveals God's nature to us, rides intentionally into Jerusalem towards his own death. It's the final revelation. In case we didn't get it seeing the Creator wrapped in swaddling. Or get it in his teachings, "**The last shall be first...**" He's going to show it in one final way in Holy Week.

It's the last chapter in this revealing story and it's for this chapter that he came. He came to give it all away... all of it... in order to gain everything for you and for me. *He became what we are that he might make us what he is.*

This is what God does... what God is. It is what Love does... what Love is. Watch him this week.

There is great courage in the Temple. He isn't captive to any anxiety. Isn't controlled by unconscious fears. There is no hiding.

There's no driven-ness by some prideful agenda... He washes feet. He isn't trying to elevate himself. His ego is in complete submission to his essence.

He doesn't need to control anything. "**Judas, do what you're going to do. Put your sword away Peter.**"

No defensiveness standing before Pilate... no need to justify or explain or put this arrogant man in his place. He is emptied.

Watch him "**offer his back to those who beat him... and not hide his face from those who will mock him and spit at him.**"

Listen to him, even in excruciating pain... how aware he is of them, of their limitation, and how willing he is to let it go. "**Forgive them... they don't know.**"

See him... in surrender. "**Into thy hands...**"

This is what Love looks like... What God is... And... And... it is the way we can be. It is what we can become. Does that seem too unbelievable? That we might be that loving... that emptied of self... that clear... Somehow above all that ties us down?

"**I cried to the Lord, and he brought me into a spacious place,**" the Psalmist said. *"Take us there, O Lord. We cry to you that we too might be loving. Lift us into a spacious place beyond the smallness of our existence.*

"**He wakens me, morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught,**" Isaiah wrote. *"Awaken us, O God, that ours might be listening ears. We are your disciples. Teach us what that means. Jesus, who was in his very nature, God... emptied himself... humbled himself unto death. Let us have this mind in us that was in Christ Jesus.*