

Luke 19:28-47

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 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, saying,

'Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!'

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

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 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. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, 'It is written,

"My house shall be a house of prayer";

but you have made it a den of robbers.'

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him;

Jesus Loves You...Whatever

Is anyone here celebrating Palm Sunday for the first time? I would venture to say no. Many of you have celebrated dozens of Palm Sundays, and we recognize that there is a disconnect; something doesn't seem right. The crowd celebrates Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as a conquering hero, but within a week they would want to kill him. Now we can understand this as the fault of the crowd, that they had the wrong expectations of Jesus. But the problem that I have, a problem that I just considered *this* Palm Sunday, is that Jesus not only orchestrated this victory parade; **HE CELEBRATED IT!**

As I reflect upon this I am utterly astounded, and I wonder why Jesus seems to be setting himself up; it is he, after all, who arranged for the colt to be brought to him, and it was Jesus

who chose this day, the beginning of the Passover – the celebration of Jewish freedom from bondage – to ride into the city in the manner that was described by the prophet Zechariah, like a king coming to take charge of the nation. He wasn't a pawn being propped up by his followers, being forced to ride this colt like a conqueror. He planned it. He wanted people to celebrate his grand entrance, knowing that those people would be beyond disappointed – they would be *angry!* The twelve disciples would be ashamed - one would betray him and later kill himself, another would deny knowing him, and the rest would abandon him at the time he needed friends the most. But Jesus knew this, and he knew he would be handed over to the high priests, then King Herod, then Pontius Pilate, and that he would not use any magic or special power to save himself. And the crowd would look upon his unwillingness to save himself as his inability to save himself, let alone establish himself as king of Israel. He would be looked upon as a fraud. I could imagine myself so disgusted with Jesus' failure to save the nation that I would be right there with the crowd five days hence shouting, "Crucify him!" Yes, I could imagine feeling betrayed by Jesus when he turns out to be so weak, so vulnerable, so...human.

And I might even resign myself to believe that Rome had the right idea, that might makes right and that people like Jesus were of no consequence. The Romans had no qualms about proving that Jesus was a mere mortal by making him suffer and die as a human and as an example to anyone who dared to challenge Roman authority. The closest thing on earth to a god was Emperor Tiberius who commanded armies, who had the power to determine who lived and who died and how they lived and how they died. That was the sign of a god; absolute power over human life, and Jesus appeared to have no power over anyone's life including his own. For him to claim kingship was more ridiculous than it was threatening. But in order to keep the peace – the *Roman* peace – they would need to make an example of this so-called King of the Jews. This was Passover week after all, and they were far outnumbered by these crazy Jews who ironically were celebrating their deliverance from slavery. Pontius Pilate would make it quite clear who Jesus was and what happens to those who challenge authority. Jesus was flesh and blood, and thirty-nine lashes from a Roman whip followed by a slow public death would make that clear to everyone.

On Good Friday the whole world was against Jesus, the great deceiver, the big disappointment, the false King, the pathetic Jew who had it coming because he asked for it.

So why did Jesus stage this grand entrance into Jerusalem? This is a mystery worth pondering this morning, because it is this action that should make us all humble ourselves in awe of him and declare him to be our Lord. Because this action by Jesus, as crazy as it may appear to us, is ultimately an act of divine love.

What makes Jesus different from me - and different from anyone – is that divine love, that unconquerable love for all people that he is able to sustain. We could tout his courage, his determination to stand up to the evil of this world made manifest in a religious system that compromises true worship in order to keep money in the coffers, an evil made manifest in a political system where might makes right and privilege comes to those who hold the reins of power, where protest is squashed with violence and cruelty – we can reflect with awe upon

Jesus' bravery in facing such evil head on. We could tout his idealism, his absolute conviction that God is coming to establish his kingdom of righteousness and justice in this world, a conviction that even a whip, a crown of thorns, and a cross could not extinguish. But what makes Jesus Jesus is not his courage or his idealism. It's his love, a love that is truly divine.

It was that love that was on display on Palm Sunday nearly 2000 years ago when Jesus rode that colt into Jerusalem to the cheering crowd. Jesus encouraged that celebration not to manipulate the crowd into a joyous frenzy in order to ensure that they would have the same level of anger five days later when he failed to meet their expectations. And he didn't rejoice with the crowd because he was ignorant of how everything would turn out for him on Friday as he hung dying on the cross; he knew that would happen. And he didn't rejoice with the crowd because he knew that come Easter that he would have conquered death and brought hope and new life to those who believe in him. Jesus celebrated because he loves us. His mood was not dampened because of the trials and tribulations he would face in the coming days. Jesus rejoiced because this was a time for celebration, and when people you love are celebrating you don't dampen the mood; you embrace it because you love those who are celebrating and you want them to continue to celebrate. As Jesus proceeded through the streets of Jerusalem being celebrated by those who would betray him and those who would deny him and those who would abandon him and those who would hate him he did not judge any of them but allowed them to rejoice in the moment. His love was such that, despite the future actions of that crowd, he would love them in the moment and be prepared to forgive them in the days ahead. To me, the clearest evidence that Jesus was the true Son of God was not the miracle of his resurrection but rather the miracle of his love. Jesus could rejoice in the company with those who at one moment were praising him and the next would be crucifying him. That more than anything else proves to me Jesus' divinity.

In a very real sense we are still in the Palm Sunday Parade. We march around with our palm branches. We sing hymns and we pray, and we praise his holy name, despite the fact that at times we betray him, at times we deny him, at times we abandon him, and at times we crucify him. And despite all of that, Jesus' love for us never falters. His love for us doesn't depend upon our faithfulness. It is the love of God that can see us as beautiful children, sons and daughters regardless of how we respond to that love.

But I encourage you, this day, this week, and for the rest of your life, to reflect upon that love that persists despite our own failure to love back. Will you celebrate such love? Will you witness such love?