

“What’s Love Got to Do With It?”
Philippians 2:1-11, John 12:12-16;
Psalm 118:26-29; Mark 8:27-36

Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015
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As I was thinking about this particular day, how we celebrate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the waving of the palms and the people shouting accolades to Jesus—Hosanna!—and how wonderful that is and how in many ways it’s so appropriate that they celebrate Jesus coming into Jerusalem. I’ve often thought about that, but I haven’t often thought about what Jesus was experiencing. I wondered what was Jesus experiencing as he began to enter Jerusalem. After all, it was very appropriate that people celebrate his coming. And yet, he already knew that this was not going to be an easy journey for him and that the people were not going to always be shouting these words of hosanna. By the end of the week it had changed to a different chorus.

We might get some sense of what Jesus was feeling if we look at a couple of other verses. First from Matthew 23, beginning at verse 27, Jesus says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophet and stones those who are sent to it. How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you are not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate.”

And then in Luke, Chapter 19, verse 41 on, it says, “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 day will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side.’”

Jesus has looked over the city of Jerusalem and he has wept over it. There’s got to be a sense of bittersweet going into Jerusalem on this particular day. The people’s accolades as he comes in—perhaps he feels they are doing the right thing even if it’s for the wrong reasons. He certainly knows that he soon will be rejected instead of that continued welcome. He brings what makes for peace, but what he brings is rejected. He himself is rejected. I think he’s aware of the suffering that will result. In fact, these verses from Matthew and Luke suggest that. He knows the suffering that is going to come upon Jerusalem, the suffering that comes from rejecting him.

He wants to show a life that goes beyond. He wants to identify another way of life. He wants to offer life in the face of a death-dealing world. It’s interesting that as the week goes on, the loudest voices are the worst voices. You wonder how often that’s true. By the end of the week, the loudest voices are crying, “Crucify him!” We talk about how much those squeaky wheels get the grease, yet we wonder what else is there. Perhaps it’s not only the loudest voice. In fact, scripture sometimes calls God’s the still, small voice.

As we think about the knowledge Jesus is coming in with, he knows that people will not set their minds on divine things. He knows that he has what brings peace, and yet it will

be rejected. It is for us to see what he is offering, what he is calling us and all his disciples to, and how easy it is to simply want him to be that conquering hero, the one who comes in power to overpower power. He doesn't come and use that kind of power. If we notice what he invites us to, he's not inviting us to positions of power like that, either.

He says folks don't set their minds on divine things. The struggle with what that means is that it often doesn't coincide with what our society tells us it's all about. He says things like we have to deny ourselves, take the path of suffering, take up our cross and follow him, lose our life. He tells us to let go of the life the world gives that is full of self-centered greed, that wants more status, that wants more things, that wants more power, yet is never satisfied. Indeed, he invites us not to want to be conquering heroes, but to see his way—a way of service. What does he do this week as he comes in as the King? He washes his disciples' feet. He feeds them. He's willing to ride on into the rejection he knows is awaiting him. He's willing to ride in because the love of God is with him and he wants to bring it to everyone. He is willing to die for that.

He doesn't ask us to come as the conquering heroes. He invites us to come in humility and service, to let go of our lives, to lose those lives, not expecting everything will work out for us, to do nothing from selfish conceit, as Paul said. He doesn't promise us goals that we can achieve. He gives us goals that give us life. He's not asking us to succeed at something. He's simply asking us to be his followers and to live out what he's called us to be, to show up in grace, to recognize that we don't know what makes for peace; he does. As we follow him, he will make peace.

Paul says if there's any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, be of one mind, one following. Here he asks us to share the love of Christ, to think about who Christ was and what he did.

What is our city that we cry over? Jesus came and wept over Jerusalem. What is the city that we weep over? Is it our community, our society, our times? Wishing we knew what makes for peace?

Jesus accepts the accolades, but he knows the real work of love is coming. He's willing to give his life for it. This work is all about life. What it takes is love. I titled the sermon "What's Love Got to Do With It?" Do you know the second line of that song? "A second-hand emotion." Well, for us, it's not a second-hand emotion. It's what brings Jesus to us. It's the very wonder of what God is all about. God so loved the world that he gave his son.

Jesus didn't come saying that he needed to be God for us all. It says he humiliated himself to walk among us, to be with us. He humbled himself. We are invited to do the same—to humble ourselves, to care about God's people, and to know that it is through the work of Christ, as we follow him, that the work of peace will be done.

Jesus is calling us not to see as the world does, but as he does, with compassion for a world that just doesn't get it and willing to give his life to save that world. We are invited to walk with him. It feels like such a hard calling sometimes, especially when he says it requires picking up our cross and following him. It might mean walking through the valley of the shadow of death. It might feel like losing our lives, and yet it is when he leads that we go to the place that makes for peace. When he leads, we will be surprised by the new life that comes. God's love isn't secondary because it's the primary reason that we are who we are. It's the primary reason for the grace of God and it invites us to live into this life, following him in humility and grace.

Let's pray:

Gracious God, we see Jesus going into the city over which he wept, going into the city to be rejected, to face the cross. He invites us to walk with him, to recognize that there are times in our lives when we come into something that we struggle with. Sometimes in our lives, there's a certain rejection from the world. Yet in following him, we follow the one who makes for peace. In following him, we lose that life that would lead us nowhere and we are given a new life, an eternal life. Lord, let us follow Christ. Help us pick up our cross when need be and follow him. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.