

Palm Sunday 2018

Observation and Conversation

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is the beginning of what the church calls Holy Week. According to the gospels, during this week Jesus cleansed the temple, celebrated the Jewish feast of Passover, eating the Passover meal with his disciples and instituting what we call the Lord's supper, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, was arrested, tried, sentenced to death, beaten, whipped, then crucified. Dying on the cross, he was buried in a borrowed tomb on Friday evening but Sunday morning the tomb was empty and Jesus had risen from the dead. It's an amazing week, but this morning we focus on his entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of this final week. Let's read Luke's account found in Luke 19:28-44. I want to make a couple of observations and then we will focus on conversations we hear in this passage (hence the title of the message) and see what lessons we can learn.

The King has returned. Long live the king. There is tremendous significance found in the way he enters the city. Jesus had spent his public ministry avoiding the spotlight. He healed people and told them not to tell others. He slipped through the crowds, unrecognized. He avoided attempts by the multitudes to make him their king by force, but today was different. By approaching the city in this manner, Jesus is saying, "I know who I am. I am the Messiah, the King." He was in a sense, accepting their recognition. In fact, Jesus arranged to ride in on a donkey because he knew that was fulfillment of ancient prophecy. More than five hundred years before the prophet Zechariah had seen this day. **"Rejoice greatly O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** Zechariah 9:9

All this time the people of Israel had been awaiting the arrival of their promised king. Speculation had grown that perhaps this rabbi from the Galilee was the Messiah. After all, he was a powerful teacher, a miracle worker. Only weeks before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and because Lazarus was a prominent citizen, word had spread! In addition, because the feast of Passover was held this week, Jews were coming to Jerusalem from everywhere. Some estimate the population of Jerusalem would swell to over 200,000. Many would come from the area of the Galilee where Jesus had performed so many miracles. They were eyewitnesses to his miracles and now they are in Jerusalem, spreading the word. Excitement was building.

Because the feast of Passover celebrated Israel's liberation from Egypt centuries before, there was always a heightened sense of nationalism at Passover. God had set them free from slavery to the Egyptians, now perhaps it was time for Him to set them free from the oppression of the Romans. With Jesus riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, the city is buzzing with the news. Could this be the Messiah? Matthew records, **“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, in Galilee.’” Matthew 21:10-11**

That's a bit of the background observations. Jesus has arrived after healing Bartimaeus and encountering Zaccheus in Jericho. He is likely staying at Lazarus' house in Bethany, on the other side of the Mount of Olives and just east of the city of Jerusalem. With his disciples on that Sunday morning they leave Bethany and as they approach the nearby village of Bethphage, Jesus tells two of his disciples, **“Go to the village ahead of you and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’” Luke 19:30-31.**

Here is the first conversation I want to comment on. Jesus tells the disciples to “borrow” a colt. I can imagine the conversation between the two disciples. “You go ahead and untie the colt.” “Why don't you do it?” “You're better with animals.” “What if someone sees us and thinks we are stealing the donkey?” Donkeys were expensive. What do we say if confronted? Just tell them “The Lord needs it.” That's exactly what happened and the owners of the colt apparently were more than happy to comply. All they needed to hear was, “the Lord needs it.”

The Lord was asking to use their donkey. What is the Lord asking of you? **In what part of your life is he saying, “The Lord needs it.”** He won't ask something of you that you don't have, so what is he asking of you? He wants to use what you have. Maybe he is asking to use your house or apartment. Maybe he is asking to use your talent, your ability, your time, your money, your car, your influence. Maybe he is asking to use your marriage. Instead of giving up on it, he is saying to you “The Lord needs it.” He wants to heal your marriage so he can use it to encourage and heal others. Maybe he is asking to use your singleness. The Lord needs it, he wants to use you to bless his church, to be a testimony to others. Maybe you aren't single by choice, but the Holy Spirit is whispering to you this morning, “The Lord needs your singleness.” Perhaps the Lord is asking to use your pain, your sorrow, to encourage someone. The Lord has

need of you, your gifts, your status, your time. Remember, he won't ask of you something you don't have. What is he asking of you?

The disciples place their cloaks on the colt, Jesus climbs on and they top the hill from the eastern side and begin the steep descent toward Jerusalem. From this vantage point they are looking down on the city, looking at the temple and the eastern gate through which Jesus would enter the city. The expectation of the people was that the king, the Messiah would enter through the eastern gate. (Here is a view of a model showing what the city and the temple mount looked like in the time of Jesus. The Eastern gate (golden gate) was closed in the 800's after Muslims took control of the city. It was opened during crusades and finally sealed in 1541 by the Muslims in order to prevent the Messiah from coming through the gate. They also placed a cemetery in front of the gates believing that would prevent Elijah from coming in advance of the Messiah. Ezekiel speaks of the Lord coming through this gate!)

It's hard to imagine what he was seeing, the thoughts in his mind knowing what the week would hold for him. He could see Golgotha from the Mount of Olives, just beyond the western walls of the city. He could see the door of the temple, the way into the holy of holies. He could see the smoke of the sacrifices, knowing he was the once and for all sacrifice that would atone for the sins of the world.

Try to imagine too what the people were feeling as they saw Jesus riding the donkey, headed toward the city. Was the prophecy of the coming of Messiah being fulfilled before their eyes? They are gazing now on the city of Jerusalem, packed with people anticipating Passover. It was a thrilling sight. It's still a thrill when you see the city of Jerusalem coming into view. Let me show you what it looks like today from the Mount of Olives.

Modern Jerusalem. Still a moving sight to me. Of course the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic shrine, stands out on the temple mount. Some believe it is built where the Jewish temple used to be. Others believe the temple was to the north of the Dome of the Rock. To the south is the Al-Aqsa mosque. You can see the Dome of the Tablets on the temple mount.

There is excitement on the road as the crowd welcomes Jesus. As they descend the Mount of Olives people began to spread their cloaks on the road before him. Others cut palm branches and laid them on the ground. Both of these things were done in recognition of the arrival of a king or dignitary. It was like rolling out the red carpet. Luke writes, **“When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began**

joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’” Luke 19:37-38

Remember many of these were people from the Galilee. They had seen his miracles. Lazarus and his sisters were likely among the crowd. The blind that could now see like Bartimaeus were there, the lame he had healed were now walking on the road with him, rejoicing. The deaf and mute he healed were talking to one another and shouting, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Matthew tells us some were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Another Messianic reference. The people were shouting, rejoicing because of the miracles he had done. But we have an even greater reason to rejoice. He has done more for us. At that moment he had worked miracles, but he hadn’t died on the cross for them. We’ve got something to shout about! We were lost, dead in our trespasses and sins and Jesus gave his life to save us. It’s reason for us to “joyfully praise God in loud voices” for what he has done. What has Jesus done for you? Have you got anything to shout about?

Look at this next conversation. **“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’” Luke 19:39-40.** It was not lost on the Pharisees, what was happening. The people were recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. He was entering the city in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy. The Pharisees were thinking, “We can’t have this. The Romans will come down on us hard if they get wind of this, that the people think this guy is the Messiah.” They wanted Jesus to tell his followers to calm down. They wanted him to say he was just another rabbi from Galilee, he wasn’t the Messiah, and they should stop shouting praises to him.

The world still wants us to go easy on acknowledging Jesus as Messiah, Savior, Son of God. “It’s okay to honor him as a religious leader, as a teacher, an example of brotherly love and peace, but don’t be promoting this idea that he is the Son of God. Don’t tell people he is the only way, the truth and the life. We can’t have that.” But we can’t deny who he is! He is the Way, the Truth, the Life! He is the Savior that died on the cross bearing my sin and he rose again in victory and triumph and he lives and rules and reigns today! I can’t deny what I know. He is the only hope, the only answer, the only solution, the only Savior. There is nobody else like Him! We can’t deny it and God help us we can’t let anyone silence us.

Jesus said, “fellows, if they keep quiet, the rocks, the stones will cry out.” Creation knows who he is! Creation won’t deny his glory, his power, his majesty, his sovereignty and neither should we. We are his children, redeemed by his sacrifice on the cross. We mustn’t keep silent. We have to testify and proclaim what the Lord has done.

Jesus said the rocks would cry out in praise. One thing Israel has is rocks. Imagine Jesus saying that as they look at the massive stones in the walls of the temple mount. Jesus says, “If these people keep quiet, after what the Father has done for them, those stones will cry out.” Praise is going to happen because He is worthy of praise. Creation knows it. Don’t let the stones do your job. We’ve got to praise him!

One more conversation I want us to consider. It is one-sided. Luke writes, **“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’” Luke 19:41-44**

Jesus speaks to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, not the followers who were rejoicing and walking down the hill with him, but those in the city who refused to listen, who refused to repent and believe, those who in a few days would be crying “crucify him.” Jesus wept as he considered the brokenness, the darkness, the pain. He knew what would come, that in a few years Titus, the future Roman Emperor would crush a Jewish rebellion and destroy Jerusalem in 70AD. Not one stone of the temple would be left on top of another, just as Jesus said.

Jesus wept because he knew his warnings, his call to repentance and faith would be rejected. “If only you had known on this day what would bring you peace!” If only we would recognize what rejecting Jesus and going our own way will lead us to. No wonder he wept. I wish I could make you understand what rejecting Jesus and his forgiveness will lead to. I wish I could convince you that a life without Jesus, living in rebellion against him will lead only to brokenness and heartache and pain. What is it that you think you will lose if you surrender your life to Jesus? Control? You aren’t in control of your life anyway. You’re being controlled by addiction, by impulse, by sin and the consequences of bad choices. What will you lose by surrendering your life to Jesus? You’ll lose your sin, your guilt, your shame. You’ll lose the

anger and hatred and selfishness and jealousy that keeps you bound. You'll lose the chains of sin and bondage and you'll find life and hope and joy and peace.

Jesus said **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace...”** The King has returned. He enters the city to cries of rejoicing and praise. But he is well aware of the other cries of heartache and pain. People are being mistreated and abused. Bitterness and anger are poisoning the lives of people. If only they had known what would bring them peace.

I read a story this week. Bruce Larson and Lloyd Ogilvie, former pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church were in Israel. They had gone to Bethany to visit the traditional site of Lazarus' tomb and decided they would retrace the steps of Jesus from Bethany to Jerusalem. As they were walking some Palestinian children joined them, just playing and being kids. Larson said as they came over the crest of the hill with the panorama of Jerusalem before them, he was so happy the children were with them. It was like recreating the Palm Sunday journey of Jesus with children shouting around them, when he was suddenly jarred back to reality when one little boy tugged at his sleeve and said, “Mister, would you like to have my sister? She lives in the house over there.” Bruce Larson said, “Suddenly, again, I understood why Jesus wept over Jerusalem. People are still being betrayed. People are still being sold. Human life is still cheap. Life without God is still awful. Jesus wept and I understand it.”

If you only knew what would bring you peace. Jesus has need of you. He wants to take you and make something new and beautiful out of you, out of your life. What do you do? You come to him, in repentance and faith. You ask him to forgive you, to save you, to give you a new life and he will do it. The King has returned and he will return again. Are you ready for his return?