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April 10, 2019

“Protest March”
Psalm 118: Luke 19:28-40

For the three years of his public ministry Jesus walked. The only time he rode was when he was in a boat...and one time when he didn't have a boat he walked....on water. On this day, for the first time Jesus chose to not walk. He chose to ride.

The town of Bethphage was about a mile and a half east of Jerusalem. There, Jesus obviously had arranged to borrow a young donkey that had never been used as a beast of burden or ridden. Old Testament instructions required such an animal for sacred purposes. (Numbers 19:2, I Samuel 6:7)

Jesus chose to ride a donkey in order to fulfill a prophesy that the prophet Zechariah offered hundreds of years earlier: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on the donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

To the Hebrews, the horse was the mount of a conquering general, but the donkey was the symbol of peace. Today, if Jesus chose a ride it would be a one of those Smart Cars that look like an overgrown skateboard with seats and a roof.

This was Jesus' "coming out" party. Earlier he had hushed up talk about his being the Messiah, but now, by his choice of steed Jesus enters Jerusalem, (which literally means, "Jeru-the city and Salem-of peace) not on a horse symbolizing he is coming in to conquer it. He comes on a donkey to symbolize he has already conquered it.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem in a way that was an unmistakable claim to be the Messiah, God's anointed King. This was an act of glorious defiance and superlative courage. Here was a man with a price on his head riding into the city in broad daylight, claiming to be the Prince of Peace, riding into the City of Peace, on a beast of Peace, disturbing the Peace.

Jesus was disturbing the peace of the people of Jerusalem. It was supposed to be a perfectly normal workday. Sunday was their Monday. Sure this was the week that the city observed the holiday of Passover and there were a lot of visitors to the town, but suddenly the word began to spread that there was a disturbing gathering outside the city. They could hear the shouts of people in the distance drawing nearer. "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest..."

The word "Hosanna" literally means, "Save Us Now!" Many in the crowd were not so much as yelling "Up with Jesus." As they were using his parade as a way of saying, "Down with Rome."

The Pharisees' peace was disturbed. Luke is the only gospel writer to record the objections of the Pharisees. They said to Jesus, "Make your disciples stop all their cheering."

Jesus replied, in effect, "Somebody is going to shout today. If the people don't, the very rocks along the path will. Now that would be something-- to have rocks give a Shout Out.

Not everyone was in favor of what he was doing. Even with the enormous following he had, there came a point when the tide began to turn against him. It wasn't noticed as much at first. People still came to see him, but the old excitement was missing, and the crowds were not as large as they had been. His critics now began to feel free to publicly attack him. That was something new. Earlier they had been afraid to speak out for fear of the masses, but they began to perceive that the fickle public was turning on him.

Why did the masses so radically turn against him? How did the shouts of Hosanna on Sunday transform into the shouts of crucify him on Friday?

One reason why the cheering stopped is that Jesus began to talk more and more about commitment.. When the 5,000 were hungry he fed them. When they brought their sick to him, he healed them. When a woman is caught in adultery and is about to be stoned, it is Jesus who comes to her rescue and saves her. But now he seems to be saying, "The time for miracles is over. The time for commitment is now."

It is interesting to note that in all four Gospels after Jesus enters Jerusalem to the shouts of Hosanna and palm branches there are no more miracles for the masses recorded.

After Jesus spoke about the rocks crying out Jesus cries his heart out. (read verses 41 through 44) In the midst of cheering and shouting, Jesus weeps over his city. The Greek word in verse 41 for weeping does not imply some quiet, restrained emotion like a silent tear trickling down one cheek. . No, this is the word used to describe heart-breaking sobbing. The word implies wailing.

Why does Jesus' cry his heart out? Because he knows what is going to happen. Jesus knows that the people will reject his call for spiritual renewal. He knows that they will turn to military confrontation with Rome, a battle He knows they will lose. Jesus' dire forecast was fulfilled forty years later when Rome devastated Jerusalem. So complete was the destruction that not one stone of the rebuilt temple was left in place. Only one small section of the city wall was left standing. Today it is called "the Wailing Wall."

The Rev. Jan Edmonson she is the Associate Executive Presbyter for the Chicago Presbytery. Wherever Jan goes she asks this question, "What is breaking God's heart in your community?"

At one of our presbytery meetings she was our keynote speaker and she shared a story that she gave me permission to share. She told us that one day she got a call from a young woman who immediately started her conversation with this. "I don't believe in God. I don't want to come to your church. But I live right behind your church and I love to play the piano and I don't have one. Would it be O.K. if I could come and play the piano some time? Jan agreed on a time when they could meet the next week. She checked with the music people and they said not to use the piano in the sanctuary, but the others would be O.K. So when Jan met with the young lady she showed her where the pianos were, gave her a key to the church and showed her how to turn off and set the alarm. Her session said, "You did what?"

Several months later she got another call. It was a young man of Indian descent. He said, "I've decided to investigate the different religions and now I'm wanting to study Christianity. Could I come to your church?" Jan said yes. He had bought a Bible and began reading it. Over several months they met once a week and Jan answered his many questions. After those months he told Jan, "I would like to be baptized because I believe in Jesus." His parents came from India for the event even though they still practiced their Hindu faith. Jan said that now that young man is the chairman of their deacons.

When he was baptized he said to Jan, "You never asked me why I chose to come to your church in the first place." She said that it didn't occur to her to ask. People come to churches for all kinds of reasons. He said, "I asked my girlfriend what church she thought I should go to and she said, "You might try that one. They gave me a key so I could play piano."

What is breaking God's heart in our community? What is happening in our community that would make Jesus stop and weep? What is happening that would make us stop and weep? Would it be people who live in our community that do not know the joy we know? Would it be people who do not have a church family? Would it involve giving keys to atheist pianists so their boyfriends can become chairmen of the deacons?

God calls us to do more than observe. God calls us to get off the curb. There are things that are breaking God's heart in our community that call us to do more than lament. There are things that still call for joining in God's continuing ... protest march.

PRAYER OF PRAISE

We praise you Lord for opening the gates of your righteousness. We are part of God's family because of your grace. Morning by morning we shall arise to praise you; day by day we shall be led by your word. Hear our rejoicing and receive our praises. Hallelujah! Amen.

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 118

When the people saw Jesus riding on a donkey to enter the city immediately their minds jumped to Psalm 118. The words sprang from their lips and the march was on. Hear the word of the Lord from Psalm 118.

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 19:28-40

In my article for the Weekly Faith Lift Newsletter and the Baytown Sun this week I talked about Jesus march into Jerusalem as a Victory Parade, but the more I think about it I think it was more like a protest march. Those who were cheering were not lauding a hero like the eventual winners of the March Madness Tournament will receive. They were shouting for deliverance from the tyranny of Rome. With those dynamics in mind, listen to the gospel account of Jesus' entry into His Capital city from Luke 19:28-40.

Let's pray. Eternal God, whose word silences the shouts of the mighty, quiet within us every voice but your own. Speak to us through the suffering and death of Jesus that by the power of your Holy Spirit we may receive grace to show Christ's love in lives given to your service. Amen.

Let's pray, Dear Lord, Your peace passes understanding. It is far more than the absence of conflict. Sometimes it calls for confrontation. Sometimes it calls for action. Sometimes it calls for sacrifice. Teach us the things that make for peace.

We thank you that the cries of Hosanna happened. That you did save then and you continue to save now. You save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore. Move us from weak resignation to strong resolve to work for the things that make for peace...peace in the hearts of people that spill out into peace among nations.

We pray for the places where peace needs to break out. We pray for soldiers in harm's way and politicians on every side of every conflict who make decisions that put them there.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones in the struggle for peace, and for those who are plotting to take away even more lives in the hope of finding peace.

Bring us to our senses. Break us out of our ruts. Move us to sacrifice in the name of peace.