

“Celebration & Tears”

Rev. Jayneann McIntosh, Lead Pastor
First United Methodist Church of Wausau
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Luke 19:28-42

... [Jesus] 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. ...”

Did you notice what’s missing in today’s text? Palms. The colt is there. Then, as Jesus rides along, people spread their cloaks on the ground ahead of him as if Jesus is king-for-the-day. That won’t have made him popular with the Romans!

Today we celebrate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, just days before he’s arrested, tried and executed. He and a whole multitude of disciples are heading down the hill from the Mount of Olives, after which they will go up into Jerusalem. As far as I could tell last November, every city in Israel/ Palestine is on a hill.

There they are, the twelve and Jesus, and many, many more, processing toward the city, praising God loudly and celebrating all that they think they know about Jesus.

In that crowd are some Pharisees – they that get a bad name because they try so hard to follow the letter of the Law and they challenge Jesus with tricky questions. “Tell the people to be quiet, Jesus!” they say, “We’re going to get in trouble.”

How does Jesus respond? “Even if they were quiet, the stones along the path would call out.” It is an exciting afternoon.

This is a big week in Jerusalem. Folks are pouring in from all over the known world. Moneychangers will have large supplies of Temple currency for all the foreign pilgrims since no Roman money is given within the Temple. Additional unblemished doves and sheep are ready

for sale there as well, for those who count on this service. Who wants to travel with extra animals? Better to wait until you arrive at the Temple and buy them there to make your offering. Residents are opening their homes to out-of-town relatives and friends. Shopkeepers and vendors are doing a booming business selling food and other essentials. To counter this flood of humanity, the Roman presence is larger and more obvious than usual.

Yes, Jerusalem is busy in these days before the Passover. It is into this scene that Jesus and his many disciples come.

In recent days and weeks, Jesus had been going about his ministry as he headed to Jerusalem. Healing people. Teaching about God's kin-dom and what it means to live into God's realm. Continuing to reach out to new people – like Zacchaeus, when he and his followers travelled through Jericho.

He had also been trying to prepare his disciples for what is ahead. But they understood none of it, maybe because they did not want to understand but also because what Jesus described seems unreal. Yes, they are an occupied nation. Yes, Jesus has been challenging the systems of power and the people who work within them, but he is also a holy man.

So this procession toward the city seems optimistic. Yet before they begin ascending into the city, Jesus pauses. He tears up as he looks around him. "Oh, Jerusalem... if only you had noticed today... if only you had recognized what it is that makes for peace!"

And there is that word again. Peace. Would you take your bulletin and read again, with me, the people's line in today's gospel text? "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Until now we might not have noticed that so much of Luke's gospel resonates around the idea of peace. At Jesus' birth, Luke writes that there was another multitude – of angels, that time – and they cried out, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

Two multitudes – one at the beginning and one near the end of Jesus' life – both praising God, both proclaiming God's peace. Then, here is Jesus, wishing fervently that the city of Jerusalem – the heart of the Jewish people – could have noticed this chance at peace when it was right in front of them.

But they missed it. People were too absorbed in their own lives. Too comfortable with the way things were, even when things were bad. Too full of their concerns for their families or jobs or communities. Too wary of what might happen if they committed to doing things differently. Too afraid. Too tired. Too apathetic.

So while a multitude of people hail Jesus as their leader – and we want to remember that even they did not understand what this meant, not yet – the vast majority of people within the city were playing it safe, living within the *status quo*.

How often are we guilty of doing this same thing? "But," you say, "we do so much! We offer a chance for people with dementia and their caretakers to get together for a fun morning. We give out toilet paper and shampoo to whomever walks in the door. We open that same door to boy scouts and cub scouts and A.A. and other community groups. We send money to all sorts of missions and community agencies."

Yes, we do. And these are things to celebrate. Well done! Yet, none of these things take us out of our comfort zone. Only a very few of the things we do as a church require that we even come in contact with the many folks in our community who are different from ourselves. And we can only live into God's intention for us when we leave the comfortable safety of our own lives and venture toward those persons. We can only know this peace Jesus talks about when we are far enough from our center of comfort that we *have to* depend on God.

When Jesus – on the previous page in Luke's gospel – tells the rich ruler to sell all he owns and to give away the money, he's talking about removing whatever prevents a person from depending upon God. Just before that, Jesus observes a tax collector who is praying, well aware of his own inadequacy, and, therefore, totally dependent upon God. What else will we find when we interpret Luke's gospel account through the lens of God's peace?

All of us are good people. We try to do good things. But there are many folks who never enter a church who also do good things; some of them, more than we do. In 1st century Palestine, most of the people in Jerusalem were probably good people, trying to lead good lives and live as best they could. Yet, Jesus sheds tears for them.

He knows that it is only through God that people can lead full, abundant lives. Only through surrendering our plans and agendas in favor of God's intention will we know this life.

Jesus has worked so hard to help people accept this gift that God offers. And, he cries in grief, and frustration, because so many have not let God turn their lives around and have thereby missed God's peace.

During the Lenten season, we walked with God through a wilderness journey in which we looked to the stars and were reminded of God's promises. We came to a table of abundance set for all persons everywhere. We were reminded that God equips and empowers *us* to mend the fabric of society.

Today we step into Holy Week. Soon we will sup with Jesus in the Upper Room. We will walk with him to the garden. We will watch all that unfolds in mute horror.

But today, we let God prepare us a little further. We accept that however secure we are, we need God. And we need to let God be in charge. We accept that whoever is in the White House or Congress or on the bench, it is God's way we must follow first and foremost. It's God's narrow path of justice and compassion, love and acceptance that we must tread. And we accept that while we have Christ with us, we need to celebrate.

We can celebrate – everyday – because Christ is with us. And we can know God's peace – in our laughing and our sighing, in our serving and being served, with our potlucks and our fasting times. We can know God's peace, if... when we give ourselves to God, utterly and absolutely.