

On the Path: When the Parade is Over©

John 12:12-19; Philippians 2:5-11

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Palm Sunday

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Today is Palm Sunday. We have almost come to the end now. We are at the end of the long 40 days of Lent where we have been on the Pathway to the cross, following in Jesus footsteps, learning the lessons of life and love from the Savior.

What would you say is the greatest lesson we have learned from him, as we think back? His conversation with Nicodemus about why God sent him into the world; his meeting with the woman at the well in Samaria; Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, from death to life; Jesus becoming like a servant and washing the feet of his disciples?

What is the theme you have seen running throughout all these lessons he has taught us on this pathway to the cross?

I've seen love. Amazing, unconditional, non-judging love. He said, "God loved the world so much he sent his Son that whoever believes in him would not die but would have life everlasting. God loves the world.

He talked to the woman at the well without judgement or the hatred most Jews showed to Samaritans. He had an intelligent and caring conversation, and her life, and the life of all the villagers who came to see for themselves, was changed. He showed love.

When he got on his knees and washed the feet of his disciples – as if he were their servant – we see a love that reverses the expectations we might have had about a mighty King. A serving, selfless love is what we see with Jesus.

And if we think those are great lessons and examples of love, wait til you see what happens in the rest of the story!

We are entering into that week called Holy Week. Today, we have entered the sanctuary waving palms and singing 'Hosanna!' remembering that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd following him was surely beside themselves after seeing the great miracle he had performed in raising a dead man back to life.

And they merged together with the great crowd of people who were in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Jerusalem, the holy city, was the place where every Jew wanted to be for Passover.

In fact, at the end of the Passover liturgy and celebration they always, still today, shout, 'This year here, next year in Jerusalem!' It was the goal of every Jew to celebrate Passover at least once in their lives in the holy city.

Bible scholar, William Barclay, writes that on one occasion, a census was taken of the lambs slain at the Passover Feast. The number was given as 256,0000. There had to be a minimum of

ten people per lamb; if that is correct, it means that there must have been as many as 2,700,000 people at that Passover Feast. That's a big crowd!

With that many people, it's a good assumption that there had to be a large number of people who came out for that parade. It was a one man parade. Just Jesus, riding on a donkey. Well, riding on a colt of a donkey. Surely it was a sight to behold. A grown man, riding a colt, feet almost dragging the ground.

But many people had heard the astounding news that this man, Jesus, had raised a man from death to life – after all the other healing miracles he had performed. This man was truly someone to look at.

Of course, people like a parade, regardless of how big or small it is. It is the excitement, the adrenaline running through the crowd that is contagious. It spreads and people catch on and pick up their own branches and begin waving and shouting.

Some knew why they were excited to see Jesus, and no doubt, some were just glory seekers. You know how it is human nature to go see what all the noise and fuss is about. We gawk at a fire or an accident. We slow down to see where an ambulance has stopped or the police are handcuffing someone. Some of the people were probably there just out of curiosity.

But, others were coming to believe that Jesus was the real Messiah – the one promised in the Scriptures. And now, here he is, fulfilling the Scripture by riding on a donkey. One of the prophets – Zechariah – wrote:

*⁹ “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey ... (Zechariah 9:9)*

At Bible study we talked about how unexpected and lowly it was for this long-awaited Messiah to ride on a donkey, but I read that it wasn't really unusual for kings to ride donkey's. In fact, it was a sign of coming in peace. A king would ride in on a horse, when coming for war, but on a donkey when coming in peace.

So, for Jesus to come into Jerusalem on a donkey really was a sign, a statement; it was a courageous act that appeared to be defiant to his enemies who had just recently tried to stone him to death, chasing him out of Jerusalem. Riding a donkey was a fulfillment of the prophecy. And those devout Jews – both his friends and his enemies – would surely recognize it for what it was.

The people shouted, quoting Scripture as Jesus rode by. ‘Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Hosanna means Save now! Save us now, Lord!

Psalm 118 is one of the *Hallel* psalms. *Hallel* is Hebrew for *Praise*.

²⁵ *Save now, I pray, O Lord;*

O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity.

²⁶ *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.

In a way, the people were shouting: ‘God save the King!’

And the temple authorities watched and shook their heads in total resolve that something was going to have to happen.

‘See,’ they said to one another, ‘there is nothing we can do to stop this. The whole world has gone after him.’ Or, is enthralled and enamored by him.

Yea. There is nothing they could do. Except finally, once and for all, have him put to death.

And Jesus knew that this parade would soon be over. The excitement, the adoration, the thrill of the moment would end. The palms would be cast aside, swept to the side of the street. He knew he was riding into the worst week of his life. He knew because he was fully aware of who he is and what his mission was about.

Can’t you imagine Jesus’ emotions as he looked at the crowd of people? The ‘whole world’ as the temple leaders said, was even more than they could ever really know. The whole world would involve the Greeks who would be coming to see Jesus – Gentiles – pagans. The whole world involved the hated Samaritans; the people of the past, and all the people in future generations – including you and me.

He knew that he would die for the whole world. It was his reason for coming to earth as a human. It was the final act of love. It was the main act of love. It was his passion – his love – for the whole world so that all who were separated from God because of sin, would be reconciled to him again and – even though they would pass through death – would never really die, but would have eternal life with God. Death would not be the end.

But oh, what a week it would be! Jesus could have stopped it. He could have saved himself. He could have said, “Nope, I changed my mind.” But, as Luke said in his telling of Jesus coming into Jerusalem, he “set his face like Flint” and rode into the last week – the worst week – of his life.

Paul says it so beautifully. Listen to Peterson’s translation of Paul’s hymn in Philippians:

⁵⁻⁸ *Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!*

Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

We came here today with an air of celebration. Everybody loves a parade. But when the parade is over, we're either shivering in our boots from standing out in the cold for a long time, or we are hot and tired from being in the sun. And we usually have a distance to walk to our car or home, carrying our blankets or folding chairs, or our children who are tired and cranky.

When the parade is over, there may be some remnants of the excitement we felt but it usually doesn't last too long. It was a fleeting moment in our day. We're ready to move on to the next thing.

Jesus moved on to the next thing as well. For Jesus, the next thing would be the Passover meal and then the Garden of Gethsemane where he prayed and cried, and where he would be betrayed and arrested and given a mock trial. He would be stripped and beaten and mocked and spit on. He would be forced to carry the cross he would die on up the hill to Calvary, where he would have nails pounded into his hands and feet. Where he would have a spear pierced into his side.

And he would die. Because God so loved the world. When the parade is over and the palms are forgotten, Jesus, passionately in love with the world he would give his life for, made his way into the last week of his life on earth.

As we go from here today into Holy Week may we go with a deep gratitude for the passionate love of Christ, given to us in his death on the cross. We might prefer to shut our eyes and find a distraction to keep up from thinking about all the horrid things Jesus went through. But friends, let us go together, with courage and perseverance. We have been on this pathway to the cross for 40 days, following Jesus. Let us not give up and turn away from this last exhausting week. Because after the cross, we will find the joy of resurrection.

Let us take moment for silent reflection as we consider this journey of Lent we've been on. What have you discovered about yourself? Have you grown? Have you learned anything? Have your found something you need to repent of and turn around?

I will give you a moment for silent, personal confession and repentance and then I will lead us in the Prayer of Confession, that we will pray together.

Let us pray ...