

“After the Parade Is Over”
Luke 19:41-44
Palm Sunday, March 20, 2016
W. Glenn Doak, Preaching

“After the parade is over . . .” Palm Sunday was near enough the happiest day of Jesus’ life. If you think about it, he did not have many happy days. He was whisked off to the foreign country of Egypt for safe keeping when he was still an infant. He was returned to Israel and was hauled up to Nazareth when he was still a little boy. It appears as though he missed his childhood. The single Biblical reference to his youth is the one where he was left behind at the Jerusalem Temple, while his parents and the Nazarene contingency headed for home. When his mother returned, she found him inside the Temple, talking to the Rabbis about “his Father’s business.” Sounds religious enough, but 12 year old boys are supposed to be boys, playing pranks, doing sports, and learning how to grow up.

Perhaps he was one of those who grew up before his time. There are dozens of idle tales about his childhood recorded in the non-canonical gospels. But, while fascinating at times, they are not Biblical and most likely untrue.

Then, while he was still young, his father Joseph died. If you lost your father, especially as a youngster, then you knew how he felt; orderless, sad, forsaken, grown up in a day. There was no hero to look up to anymore, no protector for the family. And, there were financial worries, too. Young widows were not gainfully employable back then. It appears as though Jesus, as the eldest son, took up support of Mary and his siblings. Many extremely successful men started out having to work hard at a young age. We cannot be sure, but it seems as though Jesus set aside his own plans and stayed with his family until he was 30 years old.

Then came the pain of parting. Led of God, he decided he had to leave his mother. He went off to wander through the hills, preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that he was the Messiah. He went back home to Nazareth one day to give a sermon in the synagogue, and his words were so outrageous, the townspeople tried to kill him. His brothers thought he was crazy. Most of the respectable neighbors agreed. He had some devoted followers of course, men and women who believed in him, children too, but largely he was a loner. Many successful people are. The road to excellence is always lonely.

While he had a good sense of humor and a quick wit, he does not appear to have had a lot of fun. Neither did he have the wherewithal for a comfortable, easy life. His family was poor. “The Son of man had nowhere to lay his head.” Then he became an itinerate preacher for 3 years, a traveling evangelist. Talk about the joys of ministry. If his ego needs had to be met by achieving success, he would have been sad and sorry all the time. He did gather some large crowds now and then when he preached and healed, like the 5,000 people who were fed 5 loaves and 2 fishes, but even that ended with a storm on the Sea of Galilee. The skies rained on that parade. Mostly he just had to keep moving on. He never had his own home, never had a community to support

him, never could count on church members and officers to help him through the tough times. I think he was lonely for most of the 3 years he preached.

Then, as the Jewish Passover drew near, the heavenly handwriting was on the wall. He sensed that it was going to end in a final cataclysmic rejection. He began to tell his disciples that he would be crucified by the Romans. They refused to believe him. He kept saying, "Wait and see, every last one of you will desert me." Peter said, "Never," and they all said, "never!"

Then came Palm Sunday morning: Glory be to God on high! According to John, the people who had heard that he performed a miracle came out to be there to see him. John alone mentions that the parade followed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The crowd raced up through the Garden of Gethsemane to the top of the Mount of Olives, to Bethany and Bethpage, 1.8 miles away. The whole town came. They cheered and hailed and threw their branches and cloaks on the ground. "Here comes the King!" They shouted: "Hosanna! Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Everyone loves a parade, especially if the parade and the cheering are for you. I think he enjoyed it.

You have already heard this morning what happened in the background of the parade. I don't need to repeat it here: how he sent 2 disciples after the donkey from an acquaintance's house. He then climbed aboard and rode down and up into the city, just as Judas Maccabaeus had done 150 years earlier, only Maccabaeus rode a white stallion. Those who rode donkeys were declaring peace. Victorious warriors rode huge white stallions, like the Romans did all the time.

Think about the happiest day of your life, whenever it was, when you were on the mountaintop. That is where Jesus was on Palm Sunday. Jesus said, "Cheer on folks, for, if you do not, the very stones on the ground will cry out in my honor."

Mountaintop experiences are exhilarating ... but, they are exhausting, too. They fill you with joy ... but they also drain you. You can only stay "up" for so long. I think Jesus loved his parade; but then the crowd went home. Crowds on holiday have the attention span of a gnat. "What's next now that we've seen the parade?" So, Jesus kept on going by himself.

"...When he drew near and saw the city," it says, "he wept over it, saying 'would that even today you knew the things that make for peace, but now they are hid from your eyes.'" On the happiest day of his life, he wept.

I often see that. How tears come in time of joy, how one's emotions are spent at the moment of exhilaration ... and sometimes, for no apparent reason at all, tears form in the corner of your eye. "Hey, I'm happy!" she said, "Why am I crying?" Tears play an important part in the release of tension, of sadness, and of extravagant gratitude.

Sometimes I wonder why people cry. I weep sometimes. Like when I think about the people I love the most. Especially when I think about their pain, I weep. When I hear and am moved by a piece of music a tear comes down my cheek. Sometimes when I am standing right here I feel a tear in the corner of my eye. I find myself doing a little more of that lately. The other day I was telling a group of people about the education room on the 3rd floor that was built for you all and I

felt my voice quiver as I mentioned standing at the end of the hall and looking out onto the open space and imagining what that would be one day, and glory be there it is. Sometimes in a difficult conversation someone touches a nerve within me, and I weep. I know how to weep and Jesus did, too.

In this case he wept when he looked at his beloved Jerusalem. Now think about that. His own city made him sad. I am not sure I know entirely why, but I think the main reason was the discrepancy between what he wanted it to be and what it was; what it should have been and what it had become.

You who have lived in Athens for a long time, if you catch my message, you could begin to weep, all the changes I mean. It is not that simple, really, but it will do to make the point. What a price we pay for progress!

Whatever your hometown is to you, Jerusalem was one thousand-times that to Jesus. Every good Jew had to make his pilgrimage to this citadel, this birthplace of Judaism, to the eternal city, the tomb of David, to the wailing wall, to the temple, to nearby Bethlehem where Rachel was buried. The days of Passover were nothing unless you managed to make it to Jerusalem. "Next year Jerusalem" was the cry of those who could not attend.

It was like London to the British, Paris to the French, New York to the Americans, Richmond to the sons and daughters of the south, and your own hometown to you. It was his trysting place, the spot where he belonged. It was the place to which Elijah came and from which he ascended. Tradition has it that Mohammed later flew in on horseback, and he ascended into heaven from Jerusalem. It was and is everything to a good Jew, as Jesus was, it was everything ... he wept.

He wept over how pathetic they had become; how widely they had missed the mark. The priests and rabbis were looking out for their own interests, feathering their own nests. The commands of God were on the bottom shelf. The Sadducees and Pharisees and scribes were so busy defending their own points of view, that they did not open up their eyes to see the truth. The wealthy were so devoted to their money they did not care a shekel's worth about the poor. They loved their own wee worlds and not the Lord's dominion.

"The things that make for peace," they had missed them: kindly, love, concern, self-giving. That is what really made him cry. They missed the peace they needed within their souls, within their families, within their city, their nation and the world. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace, but now they are hid from your eyes." It could have been spoken yesterday.

The things that make for peace: what are they? What did he mean? Oh dear who could pretend to reduce the eternal quest for peace within your soul and peace around the world to paragraph or two in a Palm Sunday sermon? I would not be so bold to try. But I can sketch a Biblical point of view. I think I know what Jesus meant.

First, you have to find peace within yourself. That's the eternal problem. We blame our parents and school and priest and ministers or siblings. But the problem begins inside the individual. Old

Julian Huxley spoke of many when he discussed a friend of his, “He is like a ship on which there are two captains, with equal authority. They almost never agree!” Unless you find peace within you will hardly find it around you.

Second, you must find peace with your neighbors, with your family, with all those who are different. We all stand in equal need. That over simplifies it, but a constant dynamic in human affairs and the lack of peace is that we fail to accept the others in our world as equal sons and daughters of the Lord. In order to make peace with another you have to give up something, at the least, to swallow your pride and your need to be right. Then reach out.

Third, last but first: we have to get things right with God. For atonement, our-at-one-ment with God, that is why Jesus came. Once in a while I see grown children who are at enmity with their parents. Magnify that 10,000 times—to the Nth degree when there is enmity with the heavenly Father. Augustine wrote that “Our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in Thee.”

The Romans had the power of the day, that first Palm Sunday morning. Refuse to hang the seal of Caesar on the Temple door and we will hang you upon an oak tree on a hill not so far away. The Romans had the power, the insignia of Caesar Augustus were everywhere. How impressive.

But, I was in the Holy Lands eighteen years ago. We walked every street in old Jerusalem, along the walkway on top of the wall, all around the city. We looked at everything. It is a funny thing about power, permanent power, I mean. Everywhere you look these days in the Holy Lands, there are crosses and symbols of our Lord. And, there are also a myriad of Jewish signs and symbols, too.... But, I did not see one single sign or seal of Rome or Caesar anywhere in all the city. How about that? Power is not what it seems to be. The tears of Jesus are ... “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace.”