

BEYOND THE DOORS:
SHARING A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS

THE DOOR OF CELEBRATION

Luke 19:36-44

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In the early 1800's, Henry Milman wrote a Palm Sunday hymn containing some lyrics that go like this:

Ride on, ride on in majesty,
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.

Palm Sunday is a paradox. This opening event of Holy Week is bittersweet. We break the gloom of Lent with loud hosannas only to see a cross rising on the horizon. On the one hand, Jesus prepares for it. On the other hand, He weeps over it. Palm Sunday is a day for both cheers and tears.

PALM SUNDAY IS A DAY FOR CHEERS

When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down to the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen (Luke 19:37).

Palm Sunday is a Celebration of Gratitude

Sometimes the best thing we can do is lift our hands and raise our voices saying, "Thank you Jesus." If your son had been healed, you would have been there praising God. If your sins were forgiven, you would have been there shouting hosannas. If your life had been changed, you would have been there lifting up your heart to the Lord. Celebration brings joy into life. Joy makes us strong.

The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). We're strengthened by the joyful spirit in our souls. Sometimes we are pushed so hard toward useful work and rational calculation that we have all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration.

My grandson has just learned to whistle. So he whistles all the time. When he's playing, when he's sitting, when he's riding in the car, he whistles. I thought as I listened to his whistle—I used to whistle a lot more than I do now. What has life done to my song?

What do little children do when they celebrate? They make noise. They dance, and play, and sing, and laugh, and whistle. Jesus said, "*If I were to command the disciples to be quiet, the stones themselves would cry out.*" Celebration is written

into the fabric of the universe. Joy is a part of the Christian experience. On this Palm Sunday let all God's people say, "Amen." It is right and appropriate that God's people respond with an Amen.

John Vannorsdall said, "I was sitting in the lobby of a clinic waiting for a family member to return from tests, when the man seated next to me leaned over and said, 'Are you a veteran?' Our common age suggested World War II where I served three years in the Navy. It was all the man needed. He had been a Merchant Marine. He told me about ships sunk, about bitter cold, about buddies and reunions. Even though he never shared his name I knew his identity was gratitude. He was alive and not afraid of today or tomorrow, or me. He had been poor and was now secure. He had lived with death and was alive. He was grateful and needed somebody to tell about it. It was a celebration of gratitude."

We have made it, you and I. Through many dangers, toils, and snares we have survived. There were times when we thought we couldn't. There were moments when we almost didn't. There were valleys where we thought we wouldn't. But grace intervened and we are alive. Thank God Almighty we are alive. What can we do but be grateful? Let all God's people say, "Amen."

Palm Sunday is a Celebration of Obedience

Richard Foster says that celebration is a discipline. It is not something that falls from overhead. It is not something pumped up by others. Celebration is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. Joy in the Lord comes from following the Lord. It is an outgrowth of obedience.

Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.

Several years ago there was a controversial movie called The Last Temptation of Christ. The movie basically suggested that when Jesus got into Jerusalem and the noose was tightening around his neck and there was no way out, and death was in front of him, Jesus began to reason "Why don't I just go back to Nazareth, marry, have a family, take up carpentry again, and get out of all of this. Nobody seems to care anyway."

If Jesus had done that, if he had slipped out of town as he surely could have done, gone back to Nazareth and lived like everyone else, where would we be now?

- There would be no forgiveness of sins.
- There would be no resurrection of the dead.
- There would be no life everlasting.
- We would have no friend in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.
- There would be no Cross in which to glory,
towering o'er the wrecks of time.

Of course that is not what Jesus did. Instead, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross. *Therefore God exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Philippians 2:8-10).

When the woes of life o'er take me,
Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me,
Lo! It glows with peace and joy.

Palm Sunday is a day of celebration and thanksgiving, a day to say, "Amen."

PALM SUNDAY IS A DAY OF TEARS

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 peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:41-42). Jesus wept. There are two places in the New Testament where it says Jesus wept. One was at His friend Lazarus' death and the other is here as He gazes over the city of Jerusalem. Jesus weeps for what might have been.

Matthew pushes this lament further having Jesus say, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing"* (Matthew 23:37).

There are no sadder words of tongue or pen,
Than those which say I might have been.

So near and yet so far. So close and yet so closed. Almost persuaded, nearly convinced, such potential, such possibility, such opportunity—but you would not. It makes you want to cry. Jesus wept.

Marvin Griffin ran for governor of Georgia back in the 60's. His campaign strategy was to serve barbecue dinners all over the state. As many as 10,000 people would show up for one of Marvin's BBQ's. But when it came time to vote, Marvin lost by a considerable margin. At a news conference Marvin said, "They liked my BBQ better than they liked me."

As long as Jesus was performing miracles and feeding the multitudes, people followed him. But once He started defining discipleship, asking people to deny themselves, to take up their cross and follow, the crowds thinned out, the tide of popular opinion turned, and Jesus soon found himself all alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. It makes you want to cry.

Jesus weeps. There are two words in the Bible for weeping. One is just a trickle of a tear down your cheek and the other is the eruption of the soul in brokenness.

And it is the second word that is used here as Jesus weeps a flood of tears flowing from his soul. And you've got to wonder, is not Jesus still weeping over Jerusalem, and Baghdad, and New York City, and Oklahoma City, and Washington, D.C.? If you only knew what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. He cries for what might have been.

Across the street from the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City where a terrorist bomb killed 168 people, St. Joseph Catholic Church erected a tall statue of a white-robed Christ. With bowed head, Jesus is covering his face with one hand and weeping. Wherever it could have been different than it was, Jesus weeps. He weeps for what might have been.

He weeps for what is going to be.

The days will come when your enemies will hem you in on every side and they will not leave one stone on another (Matthew 19:43). In the year 70 A.D., an army led by the Roman General Titus invaded Jerusalem, razing the city, destroying its glorious temple, brutalizing its rebellious people, leaving not one stone upon another. Jesus weeps over what is to be.

When the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of Jesus he said, *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; and by his stripes we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:4-5). Jesus weeps over the brokenness of the world.

In C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, the young boy Digory is heartbroken by the realization that his mother is dying, and that he can do nothing to save her. He raises his despairing face to the story's Christ figure, the great Lion, Aslan, and is startled to see the great shining tears in Aslan's eyes. “They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own, that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must be sorrier about his mother than he was himself.” “My son, my son,” says Aslan. “I know grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. So let us be good to one another and take care of one another.”

Wherever people grieve, Jesus weeps.
Wherever children suffer, Jesus weeps.
Wherever lives are torn apart, and hearts are empty,
and hope dies, Jesus weeps.

I am told that the signed name for Jesus is a tap of the fingers on the palm of each hand, indicating the marks of the nails. His wounds tell us who He is. Jesus weeps. That's what the cross is all about. When Jesus accepted a terrible death, he redeemed our dying, transfigured all our pain.

There is nothing we can suffer that Christ does not know. There is nothing we can experience that He has not shared. There is nothing that we endure that He cannot somehow use for the healing of the nations. There are some wounds we will not likely overcome, but it is His presence, not recovery, that enables us to believe again that all shall be well. For by dying with Christ we can hope to rise

with him into eternal life.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified.
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide.

Especially this week, may Jesus keep us near the cross.

Amen.

