

“DANCING IN THE STREETS”

Luke 19:28-40

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Let me tell you a story about Larry Walters. Larry was a thirty-three year old truck driver. For as long as he could remember Larry wanted to fly--to go up in the air and see life from that perspective. But timing and education and opportunity never came to Larry. So Larry spent a lot of summer afternoons sitting in his back yard in an ordinary old lawn chair, the kind with webbing and rivets, just like the one you've got in your back yard.

The rest of Larry's story was told by the Los Angeles media. You see, one day Larry hooked up 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons and tied them to that old lawn chair.

He tied a six-pack of beer to one leg and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to the other leg. Then Larry strapped a parachute on his back and hooked a big C.B. radio to his trucker's belt. He sat down in that lawn chair with a BB gun in his lap to shoot out enough balloons to get back to earth. Larry thought he would go up about 200 feet. Instead he shot up 11,000 feet right through the approach corridor of the Los Angeles International Airport.

When Larry finally shot out enough balloons to return to earth, reporters were everywhere. They bombarded Larry with all kinds of questions. "Were you afraid?" "Wonderfully so," said Larry. "Are you glad you did it?" To which Larry said, "Oh yes!" And then one reporter asked, "What made you do such a thing?" Larry responded, "Sometimes you just can't sit there."

The first Palm Sunday was a "sometimes you just can't sit there" kind of day. In this rag-tag parade that reminds you more of a "mule day" than "Derby Day", the powers that be demand the rabble to be quiet lest they stir up a riot. This

common crowd is much too loud but Jesus says, "I tell you if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will cry out in thanksgiving."

The hills are alive with the signs of transformation.

Certainly that's true in Nashville, Tennessee, this spring day.
An old Oxford carol puts it this way:
*Spring has now unwrapped the flowers,
Day is fast reviving.
Life in all her growing powers,
Toward the light is striving.
All the world with beauty fills, gold and green enhancing.
Flowers make glee among the hills,
And set the meadows dancing.*

This is our Father's world. He shines in all that's fair.
When the redbuds bloom and the dogwoods blossom, tulips open, and the pansies perk up, I feel sorry for atheists who have no creator to thank.

The wonder of it all never ceases to amaze. Since childhood I've pondered how a brown cow can eat green grass and give white milk that makes yellow butter. And since I've been a little kid, I've wondered how it was that you could take that seed and push it down into the dark earth and it would sprout into a green plant that would bear much fruit. And through the years, I've discovered that the stars shine brightest on the darkest of nights, and the sun rises victoriously whether I desire it or not. No government agency needs to declare it legal, no Church conference needs to take a vote on it, and no civic club needs to help it happen. As one small creature of our God and King, I want to lift up my voice on Palm Sunday and sing, "Alleluia to Christ the King."

The stones themselves are telling the glory of God.

If you don't think rocks talk, you've never slipped a precious stone on the finger of a significant other. Thomas Moore says enchantment invites us to pause and be arrested by whatever is before us. Nature remains full of mystery. The mountains, the rivers, the rocks and the deserts, enjoying a lifetime far

exceeding our own, give us a taste of eternity.

One of my members gave me a joke last week, hoping to improve on mine, for which I'm grateful. It went something like this: A certain rich man complained to the Lord about a way to take some of it with you when you die. "No way," replied the Master. "It's just unfair", complained the man. "All right", said the Lord, "you can bring one suitcase full of whatever you desire when you come over to the other side." The surprised man found himself in quite a predicament. "What on earth am I going to take with me now that I have a chance to take something with me?" he wondered. So he came up with a brilliant idea. He decided to cash in much of his wealth and buy gold bars. And so he did. In heaven, the creative man opened his suitcase full of gold and the Lord of all creation looks at it puzzled for a minute then says, "You mean you brought road pavement to heaven with you from earth?"

When you think about it, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind comprehended the things God has planned for those who love Him. It makes you want to dance, to dance all night, and then to dance some more.

Isn't this the setting of this triumphant entrée that we call Palm Sunday? They could have danced all night and then have danced some more.

Verse 37 says, "When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to joyfully praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen." All four gospels tell the story of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Luke's account is distinctly different from the other three. Matthew has Hosannas -- Luke has none. John has palm branches -- Luke has none. Mark has a crowd, two and one half million, perhaps -- Luke has disciples. Did you catch it? For Luke, the celebration consists of followers. Did the disciples get it? Probably not. Peter still had three denials under his belt. Thomas still had a lot of doubts. Judas was still going to betray Jesus. But were they a fickle crowd that was just too

loud? Luke thinks not. They were disciples. They were glad and they were grateful. As complex and complicated as their devotion may have been, they knew they loved this man from Galilee. On Palm Sunday, they wanted the world to know. So they danced, they danced in the streets.

Those who were critical of it said it was a motley crew. Indeed it was. The women were there. Mary Magdalene was there fresh from anointing Jesus with oil. She didn't know how to love Him, what to do, how to move Him. She knew how to use men and to be used by them. She knew how to survive in a man's world where a woman was nothing more than a piece of property. She looked for love in all the wrong places, looked for love in too many faces. Then Jesus came. How could she be anyplace else, except there in the streets dancing through the day?

The widow was there. You know the one that had the son so far gone that the funeral procession was already forming. The doctors had said, "We've done all we can do." The insurance company had said, "We've gone as far as we can go." Her only comfort came from friends who filled the streets around her little home in that town called Nain. Then Jesus came. His heart was touched with her grief. He looked at her and said, "Don't cry." Then touching the coffin, He called to the young man, "Get up, get up, your mother needs you." They were there that day--the mother and her son, dancing in the streets, thanking Jesus for what He had done.

The children came. You can't have a parade without children. The children were there. The one who shared his lunch so Jesus could feed a multitude, brought his family with him. They were on the front row. The kid was smiling from ear to ear. As Jesus passed by on the back of that mule, He gave the kid a high-five. The little boy turned to his mother and daddy and said, "I told you, I told you, He'd recognize me. He knew who I was." The little boy was there that day with his mama and daddy, remembering the miracle that he and Jesus had done together.

Former cripples rubbed shoulders with former crooks.

The white-collar people carried on conversations with the blue-collar people. Some wore no shirts at all. Zaccheus was there, writing checks, trying to pay back the things he had done wrong. Bartemaueus was there but without a beggar's cup in his hand. Nicodemus came, running great political risk to be seen in that crowd of people supporting Jesus. The visit, one night had so changed his life that on the day of the great parade, he was there. Lazarus was there, fresh from the grave, dancing in the streets. They came; disciple after disciple, following Him that day in the streets.

In June 1990, a woman and her fiancé went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston to plan their wedding reception. They both had expensive tastes. By the time that the menu was chosen and table decorations selected, the bill had come to about \$13,000 -- half of which they had to pay that day. A few weeks later when they were ready to send out the announcements, the potential groom got cold feet and backed out on the whole deal. When the bride returned to the Hyatt to cancel the reception, she discovered that the contract was binding. She had two choices. She could cancel the party and lose her money, or she could go on with it another way.

Ten years before, this bride had spent a few days at a homeless shelter in a tough time of her life. So she decided to throw a party for the down and out of Boston. That's what she did. She changed the menu to boneless chicken, in honor of the groom, sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. On a warm summer night, people who were used to peeling half-gnawed pizza off cardboard dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d'oeuvres to senior citizens propped up by crutches and aluminum walkers. Bag ladies and vagrants who spent most of their life trying to make it in the streets took the night off and sipped champagne, ate chocolate cake and danced to the big band tunes.

Phillip Yancy, who tells that story in his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, says that's what God is like. He's

throwing a party for the likes of us. On Palm Sunday the party spills over into the streets and they dance all day.

I have only one question for you today--**will you join the great parade?** Will you let your face be greasy with the grace of God? Will you dance then, wherever you may be?

You see discipleship is the direction our feet start moving when we discover we are loved. And old Larry the truck driver was right; sometimes you just can't sit there.