

“Do You Recall Your First Parade?”

Luke 19:28-44

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
April 9, 2006

I was in the first parade I ever saw. In my home town, Vacation Bible School was promoted by a parade down Main Street. On the Saturday before VBS began, all the children would gather at the church and march through town. We had a band playing music, clowns throwing candy, cowboys riding horses and children carrying signs advertising VBS. What a fun day that was for kids of all ages.

Jesus might have been in the first parade he saw, too. His final entry into Jerusalem turned into a parade with his disciples celebrating his arrival.

The scene, which has been reenacted every year since the Fourth century, opens on the eastern side of the city near Bethpage and Bethany. Jesus sends two disciples to get a colt that he can ride into the city. As he approaches Jerusalem, his disciples line the roadway spreading their cloaks before him, shouting words of affirmation and praise.

There are three things that Jesus did that day that reverberate with meaning. Let me share them with you along with a challenge to follow in his steps.

Jesus entered the city during the day rather than under the cover of dark. This took a lot of courage.

The great storyteller, Garrison Keillor concluded one of his folklores about a young farmer by saying, “Life is not for the timid.” Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was anything but timid. Why was it so bold?

Jesus was not merely riding into a city filled with happy celebrants; he was entering hostile, enemy territory. He was riding into the eye of a storm.

Openly he had characterized the Pharisees as greedy, arrogant, insensitive and hypocritical. He accused them of oppressing their followers rather than liberating them. He criticized them for building barriers, not bridges, between people. He rebuked them for their attempts to limit God’s accessibility. He refused to validate their beliefs, approve their lifestyles or reward their successes. How do you think this was received? Look on the cross and you will find your answer.

Why would Jesus enter the city in such a visible way knowing his life was in danger? Why not slip in at night when no one would notice? Perhaps he valued some things more than his life, and I believe he did. He was willing to risk his own life in order to create a world where “justice rolls down like an ever rolling stream.”

Do you recall what Jesus read when he walked into the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry? “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Then he rolled up the scroll and handed it back to the attendant. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”” Luke 4:18-21.

How could the person that made this bold claim ignore the plight of the people that were poor, confined, oppressed and blind? He could not. His faith had prepared him for such a time as this and provided the courage he would need.

Has your faith done this for you? Where does your voice need to be heard? Who needs you to speak with them in their struggle for economic justice, religious freedom or racial equality? Who is waiting for you to stand with them against the forces of evil?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer took the advice of friends that feared for his life and left Germany in 1939 to teach theology in the safety of Union Seminary. However, he came to the conclusion that

the evils of Nazism and its corrupt leader, Hitler had to be exposed and opposed, so he returned to Germany from the safety of New York City. He entered the eye of the storm where he continued speaking out against this brutal dictator. He paid with his life for this courageous decision when he was executed days before American forces would have liberated him. He did not die in vain, though. His voice still speaks and inspires all that love freedom and pursue justice.

Secondly, Jesus rode a donkey into the city, not a horse. This required a lot of wisdom and discernment.

For decades, the Jewish people had been looking for another conquering warrior like Judas Maccabeus. He was the leader of the Jewish revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes that led to the cleansing of the temple, the restoration of Jewish religious and political life and the formation of an independent Jewish state. Would Jesus be that person? Would he collaborate with existing leaders to overthrow the Romans with political force and military violence? Would Jesus establish an earthly kingdom with defined boundaries and plenty of powerful positions of authority? Would he validate their beliefs and satisfy their desires for deliverance from Roman rule?

No, he would not. Instead he taught and modeled that positive and permanent change would occur, not through intimidation and force, but through the redemptive power of suffering love. Building bridges, not barriers would lead to “peace on earth good will toward men.” It would provide the framework for a new kingdom where, as one of our Sunday School teachers said, “true riches are found among the poor, true strength among the weak and the power of love replaces the love of power.”

Because of this he did not ask for a horse to ride into Jerusalem, but a donkey. He chose a noble beast that symbolized peace rather than one associated with war.

How was he able to resist the temptation to become another Judas Maccabeus, leading a bloody revolt? He was wise enough to know that violence would resolve nothing, but lead to more violence. Peace would follow only justice and mercy and he was committed to pursuing them, even if it cost him his life.

Our world desperately needs peacemakers and all of us who follow Christ must respond to the call. Where could you diffuse a volatile situation through the redemptive power of suffering love? What could you say or do at home, on your job or in your community to help resolve conflict? Follow Jesus’ example and do your part to bring “peace on earth goodwill toward men.”

Finally, when Jesus approached the city he did not celebrate with those along the parade route. He broke down and cried. I don’t think I have ever seen the grand marshal of a parade cry, unless they were tears of joy. Jesus’ tears were certainly not tears of delight, but the heaviest sobs of sorrow and compassion.

His heart was broken because the religious leaders were blind to their own need for repentance and forgiveness. Instead of pursuing justice and peace, they were committed to feeding their own insatiable hunger for power and possessions. Jesus knew in his heart that the leaders whom he needed to convince had rejected his message of love and decided to take up arms against Rome, a decision that would result in disaster. As he looked over the city and contemplated the future, he wept.

“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 you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you’ ” Luke 19: 41-44.

Years ago a movie was produced titled, “The Future.” After seeing it, someone scribbled on the marquee outside the theater, “I saw it and did not like it!”

Whose future has moved you to tears? Could it be your own or someone’s you love? What do you need to do in order to make changes or help someone else make changes before it is

too late? Would you ask Jesus to help you? I have to believe that even on the first Palm Sunday Jesus would have gladly worked with those that were seeking to harm him in order to save his people from the horrors of war.

Did you see Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's groundbreaking musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar?" Telling the story of the last seven days of Jesus' life, this rock opera dramatized Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the unrest caused by his preaching and popularity, his betrayal by Judas, trial before Pilate and crucifixion. Listen to Jesus' lament as he nears his death.

*Neither you Simon, nor fifty thousand
Nor the Romans, nor the Jews
Nor Judas, nor the twelve
Nor the priests, nor the scribes
Nor doomed Jerusalem itself
**Understand what power is
Understand what glory is
Understand at all**
If you knew all that I knew
My poor Jerusalem
You'd see the truth
But you'd close your eyes
But you'd close your eyes
While you live
Your troubles are many
Poor Jerusalem
To conquer death
You only have to die.*

As we begin Holy Week, it is my prayer that we will seek to understand Jesus and his mission so that we can follow in his steps. Our world needs all of us to become, like our Lord, wise people of courage and compassion. I challenge you to let your voice be heard as you stand against the forces of evil. I encourage you to be a peacemaker and begin by confessing your sins even as you become a role model for change and hope. What a positive difference this would make in the world. I think it would turn Jesus' tears of sorrow into tears of joy.