

Bitter Sweet

On Sunday we marked the beginning of Holy Week by exploring the classic Palm Sunday Story and considering what we can learn from it.

1. Warm-up Question: The Palm Sunday story is bitter sweet. On the one hand, multitudes of disciples recognized and celebrated Jesus for who he is. On the other hand, Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem set in motion a series of events that led directly to his death. Life is full of bitter sweet moments – some very serious, some funny. When you hear the phrase “bitter sweet,” what comes to mind for you?
2. On Sunday, we divided the Palm Sunday story into three component parts. First, read Luke 19:29-34 (printed on p. 3).
 - a. There are several key actors in this part of the story, starting with the two disciples. Imagine you were one of them and Jesus told you to go into the village and take the first young donkey colt you saw, would you have done it? How would you have felt? What do we learn from these two disciples?
 - b. Now imagine yourself as the owner of the donkey. Two strangers untie your donkey and start to walk off with it. You ask, “What are you doing?” The strangers say, “The Lord needs it.” How would you have likely reacted? What do we learn from the owner of the donkey?
 - c. Now imagine yourself as the donkey. When you realized that you – out of all the donkeys in the world – had been selected to escort the King of Kings into Jerusalem, how would you have felt? What do we learn from the donkey?
 - d. Jeff suggested that this first part of the Palm story illustrates that there are no accidents in life. Just the right person with just the right donkey “happened” to be in just the right place at just the right time. It's an example of God's providence, i.e., that God is active in every situation – even terrible situations that God did not want to happen – seeking good and creating opportunities. Tell us about a time in your life when you (or someone else) just “happened” to be in the right place at the right time to do the right thing.
 - e. Jeff said, “Life is like a dance. We make a move. God makes a move. Somebody else makes a move. God makes another move. And back and forth it goes; the sacred dance of life. Even when somebody screws up, God doesn't give up. God just makes another move.” In this view of things, life is a delicate, back-and-forth balance between God's will and human free will. How does that way of seeing things sit with you? How hands-on or hands-off do you think God is?
3. Now read the middle part of the Palm story. Luke 19:35-40 (printed on p. 3).
 - a. Based on what the story says, what people celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and how many of them were there?

- b. Most of the disciples celebrating Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem were oblivious to his impending death, but Jesus clearly foresaw that this was the beginning of the end (e.g., Matthew 16:21-23). For him, the Palm parade must have been very bitter sweet. It was a great moment, but death was just around the corner. Yet Jesus refused to call off this great celebration, encouraged it, and threw himself into it. By doing so, he gave us a great example of how we should find ways to celebrate even in the midst of trouble. Jeff told how his brother-in-law Bobby danced with abandon at his son's wedding even though ALS had already ravaged his body and made his dancing very awkward. Have you ever known someone who could really celebrate even when they were very ill or even facing death? Tell us about what you observed.
 - c. Given the way your personality is put together, does celebration come easy to you or do you tend to be serious and somber? For those of us who tend to be serious and somber, why is it so important to learn to celebrate life more? What holds us back? What are some practical ways we become more celebratory?
4. Now read that last part of the Palm story. Luke 19:41-44.
- a. At the end of the Palm parade, when Jesus sees the holy city of Jerusalem, he weeps. He predicts the destruction of the city "because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." What does that mean? What did they fail to recognize?
 - b. Only a small minority of Jesus' countrymen ultimately recognized who he was. The vast majority were oblivious, like the photo Jeff showed of teenagers at a museum preoccupied with their phones as a Rembrandt masterpiece hung on the wall behind them. After all the signs Jesus had offered, how could so many of his people have failed to embrace him as the long-awaited Messiah? What's the lesson there for us?
 - c. Suppose the vast majority of Jesus' countrymen had recognized and embraced him for who he was. How might history have been different?
 - d. In your own life, when have you missed a God Moment? What caused you to miss it?
 - e. In your own life, when did you embrace a God Moment? What caused you to embrace it?

*Good Friday Service April 2 at 7:00 pm at the Church
Special Guest Preacher: Rev. Dr. Kimberly Russaw
"One of Six Black Women at the Center of Gravity in Theological Education"*

Easter Sunday Service April 4 at 9:00 am and 11:00 am at the Church

*Good Friday & Easter Livestreamed on Facebook, You Tube, and Church Website
In-Person Reservations at LifeJourney.church/easter*

Part 1 = Luke 19:29-34

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this: 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it."

Part 2 = Luke 19:35-40

³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Part 3 = Luke 19:41-44

41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴²saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."