

Luke 19:28-40  
April 17, 2011  
Palm Sunday

**THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS  
“WHY ARE YOU UNTYING IT?”**

(Before scripture)

DURING LENT, WE’VE BEEN LOOKING AT QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED.

IN THE MIDST OF A GREAT STORM, HE ASKED THE DISCIPLES, “*WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?*”

WITH THOUSANDS OF HUNGRY MEN & WOMEN BEFORE HIM, HE ASKED THOSE SAME DISCIPLES, “*HOW MANY LOAVES OF BREAD DO YOU HAVE?*”

HE ASKED A MAN WHO HAD BEEN CRIPPLED FOR 38 YEARS, “*DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?*”

HE ASKED HIS CLOSEST FOLLOWERS, “*WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?*”

AFTER TELLING MARTHA THAT HE IS THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE, HE ASKED “*DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?*”

TODAY, WE COME TO A QUESTION THAT DOESN’T SEEM TO FIT WITH THE OTHERS.

AND, IT DOESN’T.

IT’S NOT REALLY A QUESTION THAT JESUS IS ASKING OF SOMEONE BUT A QUESTION HE KNOWS WILL BE ON THE LIPS OF SOMEONE ELSE.

OUR SCRIPTURE READING FOR THIS PALM SUNDAY IS LUKE 19:28-40.

(After scripture)

HAROLD ARLEN IS PROBABLY MOST FAMOUS FOR BEING THE COMPOSER OF THE MUSIC FOR “THE WIZARD OF OZ,” INCLUDING “*OVER THE RAINBOW.*”

HE COMPOSED HUNDREDS OF OTHER SONGS, THOUGH, AMONG THEM “*I LOVE A PARADE.*”

WHO HASN’T THOUGHT OF THAT SONG WHILE WATCHING A PARADE?

I CAN THINK OF A FEW MEMORABLE PARADES I’VE EXPERIENCED.

WHEN WE LIVED IN SCOTTSBURG, INDIANA, THE BOYS’ HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TEAM WON THE SECTIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP & THEY WERE WELCOMED BACK TO TOWN WITH A PARADE.

THE POLICE CAR (YES, SINGULAR) LED THE PARADE, FOLLOWED BY “THE” FIRE TRUCK & BRINGING UP THE REAR WAS A PICK-UP OWNED BY ONE OF THE LOCAL CAR DEALERSHIPS.

ALL THE BOYS RODE IN THE BACK TO THE CHEERS OF “DOZENS” OF US WHO LINED MAIN STREET TO WELCOME THEM HOME.

WHEN DAVID WAS STILL A PRE-SCHOOLER, OUR FAMILY WENT TO A PARADE IN PITTSBURGH TO WELCOME THE PENGUINS HOME AFTER WINNING THE STANLEY CUP.

IT WAS QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT FROM THE SCOTTSBURG EXPERIENCE.

WE HAD ARRIVED EARLY TO GET CLOSE TO THE FRONT SO THE BOYS WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE.

AS THE FANFARE BEGAN, PEOPLE IN THE REAR STARTING PUSHING TOWARD THE FRONT & WE LITERALLY FEARED FOR OUR LIVES AS WE WERE BEING SMASHED AGAINST THE FRONT BARRIER, MAKING US FEEL LIKE WE ARE AT AN INTERNATIONAL SOCCER MATCH.

PROBABLY THE MOST MEMORABLE PARADE EMMA SUE & I HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED, THOUGH, WAS IN LONDON OUTSIDE BUCKINGHAM PALACE FOLLOWING THE ROYAL WEDDING OF PRINCE CHARLES & PRINCESS DIANA.

THE MOOD THAT DAY, AS YOU CAN WELL IMAGINE, WAS AS ELECTRIC, EXHILERATING & EXCITING AS ANYTHING I'VE EVER EXPERIENCED.

IN JUST TWO WEEKS, THE ENGLISH WILL AGAIN BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THAT SAME KIND OF EXCITEMENT.

HOPEFULLY, THE END RESULT WILL BE BETTER THAN THE ONE WE EXPERIENCED.

IT'S ALMOST AS IF CHARLES & DIANA (OR AT LEAST ONE OF THEM) DIDN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE.

BEFORE LONG, SOMETHING MYTHICAL & MAGICAL TURNED SOUR.

IT'S VERY SIMILAR TO THE PARADE IN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE READING.

THOSE WHO WERE THERE THAT DAY DIDN'T SEEM TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE.

SOMETHING MYTHICAL & MAGICAL QUICKLY TURNED SOUR.

BY THE END OF THE WEEK, THE ONE BEING HONORED IN THAT PARADE HAD BEEN NAILED TO A CROSS.

ONE OF THE THINGS WE DON'T UNDERSTAND ABOUT THIS PARADE IS "WHY NOW?"

WHY IS IT THAT NOW JESUS ALLOWS & EVEN ENCOURAGES SUCH UNINHIBITED ACCLAIM OF HIM AS MESSIAH WHEN ALL ALONG, HE HAD BEEN SO EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO DO SO?

PERHAPS ONE REASON WHY JESUS HAD EARLIER BEEN SO SILENT ABOUT HIS IDENTITY & HAD ENCOURAGED HIS DISCIPLES TO TELL NO ONE WHO HE WAS, IS BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WANT TO ENCOURAGE MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS THAT WERE POLITICAL & NATIONALISTIC IN NATURE.

THOSE EXPECTATIONS RAN COUNTER TO WHAT HE KNEW HE WAS CALLED TO BE AS A SERVANT LEADER.

MAYBE HE WANTED TO AFFORD THE PEOPLE ONE MORE CHANCE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HIS ROLE AS GOD'S MESSIAH REALLY WAS.

MAYBE HE WANTED THEM TO SEE THAT HE WASN'T GOING TO OVERTHROW THE ROMANS.

HE HADN'T COME TO WAGE WAR WITH SWORDS & SPEARS.

HE HAD COME TO WAGE WAR AGAINST SIN & TO SERVE AS A MODEL OF PEACE & LOVE & GOOD WILL.

IT'S IRONIC IN THIS PASSAGE NEAR THE *END* OF LUKE'S GOSPEL THAT HE TAKES US BACK TO THE VERY *BEGINNING*.

IN THE MIDST OF THIS EXUBERANT PARADE, THE DISCIPLES CRY OUT, "*BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! PEACE ON EARTH & GLORY IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN!*"

WITH THESE WORDS, WE ARE TRANSPORTED BACK TO THE HILLSIDE OF BETHLEHEM & THE SHEPHERDS WHO HEARD THE CRY, "*GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND ON EARTH PEACE AMONG THOSE OF HIS FAVOR.*"

IN THIS PALM SUNDAY PARADE, LUKE BRINGS CHRISTMAS & EASTER TOGETHER.

HE ENVISIONS A COMMUNITY LIVED OUT IN THE WHOLENESS & SALVATION OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN OPPRESSED.

RIDING WITH JESUS ON THAT DONKEY ARE THE HOPES & FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS.

RIDING WITH HIM ARE THE DREAMS OF THE OPPRESSED & EXPLOITED PEOPLE ACROSS THE AGES WHO LONG FOR A KING TO DELIVER THEM.

WE'RE STILL LEFT TO WONDER, THOUGH, WHY THE CHEERS TURNED TO JEERS IN LESS THAN A WEEK'S TIME.

COULD IT HAVE BEEN ANOTHER QUESTION JESUS ASKED IN THE VERY NEXT CHAPTER & PROBABLY ON THE VERY NEXT DAY?

BEFORE THINKING OF *THAT* QUESTION, THOUGH, LET *ME* ASK ONE OF *YOU*.

THIS WEEKEND, WHAT IS ON PEOPLE'S MINDS EVEN MORE THAN PALM SUNDAY & THE BEGINNING OF HOLY WEEK?

FRIDAY WAS APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup> & WE'VE BEEN GIVEN AN EXTRA TWO DAYS – FOR MANY, AN EXTRA TWO DAYS TO STRESS & WORRY.

STRESS & WORRY OVER WHAT?

TAXES, OF COURSE.

WE'RE ALWAYS CONCERNED ABOUT TAXES & EVEN MORE SO THIS YEAR IN THE MIDST OF CONTENTIOUS DEBATES OVER BUDGETS – BE THEY FEDERAL OR STATE BUDGETS.

THE PEOPLE OF JESUS'S DAY WERE NO DIFFERENT.

THE DAY AFTER JESUS ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM, HE WAS ASKED ABOUT PAYING TAXES TO THE GOVERNMENT.

HE ASKED FOR A COIN & THEN HE ASKED A QUESTION: “*WHOSE PICTURE IS ON THE COIN?*”

HE THEN TOLD THE PEOPLE TO GIVE TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S & GIVE TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S.

THIS ISN'T WHAT PEOPLE WANTED TO HEAR.

THEY WANTED A RABBLE-ROUSER.

THEY WANTED SOMEONE TO LEAD THEM IN A POLITICAL REVOLUTION.

BUT AS JESUS RIDES INTO JERUSALEM ON A LOWLY DONKEY, HE'S TELLING US HE'S NOT THAT KIND OF KING & GOD'S RULE ISN'T THAT KIND OF RULE.

HE COMES IN HUMILITY & HUMILITY ALWAYS MAKES US UNEASY.

THE DONKEY RIDE OF JESUS ON PALM SUNDAY IS A REJECTION OF POWER & POLITICAL AMBITION.

IT'S A REJECTION OF THE DESIRE TO DOMINATE OTHERS & LIVE LIVES THAT ARE SELF-CENTERED & SELF-SERVING.

LOOK, FOR JUST A MOMENT AT OUR QUESTION FOR TODAY.

“*WHY ARE YOU UNTYING IT?*”

SURROUNDING THIS QUESTION IS AN INCREDIBLE LEVEL OF OBEDIENCE.

JESUS COMMANDED TWO OF HIS FOLLOWERS TO HONOR THIS ODD REQUEST TO GO INTO A VILLAGE & GET HIM A DONKEY.

THEY OBEYED WITHOUT QUESTION.

WHEN THE OWNER OF THE DONKEY ASKED THE QUESTION JESUS KNEW HE WOULD ASK - "WHY ARE YOU UNTYING IT?"- AND WHEN THE DISCIPLES OFFERED THE ANSWER JESUS HAD INSTRUCTED THEM TO GIVE - "*THE LORD HAS NEED OF IT,*" HE OBEYED WITHOUT QUESTION.

FOR JESUS, OBEDIENCE MEANT CARRYING A CROSS.

FOR MOST OF US, IT MEANS LIFTING COUNTLESS LITTLE CROSSES EVERY DAY - REACHING OUT AS CHRIST DID TO SERVE OTHERS IN NEED.

JESUS WAS ALWAYS FOCUSED ON OTHERS.

LOOK AGAIN AT EACH OF THE QUESTIONS WE'VE ALREADY CONSIDERED DURING LENT.

HE ASKED THE DISCIPLES, "*WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?*" IN AN EFFORT TO CALM THEIR FRETFUL NERVES.

HE ASKED THEM "*HOW MANY LOAVES OF BREAD DO YOU HAVE?*" TO INVITE THEIR PARTNERSHIP IN HIS MINISTRY OF LOVE & SERVICE.

HE ASKED THEM "*WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?*" TO ENCOURAGE THEM IN THEIR BELIEF SYSTEM.

HE ASKED A MAN WHO COULDN'T WALK, "*DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?;*" TAKING THE INITIATIVE BEFORE THE MAN HAD EVEN UTTERED A REQUEST.

HE ASKED MARTHA, "*DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?*" TO EASE HER SORROW & RELIEF HER PAIN.

JESUS ALWAYS THOUGHT FIRST OF THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.

HE NEVER THOUGHT FIRST OF HIMSELF.

HE NEVER OVERLOOKED THOSE WHO WERE CONSIDERED THE DOWN & OUT, THE UNIMPORTANT - THE OUTCASTS.

THINK OF THOSE WORDS WE JUST HEARD SOPHIE SING - WORDS FROM ISMERALDA IN DISNEY'S "THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME" - (OR "NOTRA DOM" FOR THE SMART PEOPLE AMONG US):

*"GOD HELP THE OUTCASTS, HUNGRY FROM BIRTH,  
SHOW THEM THE MERCY, THEY DON'T FIND ON EARTH.  
GOD HELP MY PEOPLE, WE LOOK TO YOU STILL,  
GOD HELP THE OUTCASTS, OR NOBODY WILL."*

ISMERALDA CONCLUDES WITH WORDS THAT RUN COUNTER TO OUR SELF-SERVING & SELF-CENTERED NATURE & DISPLAY THE VERY LOVE & COMPASSION OF CHRIST -

*"I ASK FOR NOTHING, I CAN GET BY,  
BUT I KNOW SO MANY, LESS LUCKY THAN I,  
PLEASE HELP MY PEOPLE, THE POOR & DOWNTROD,  
I THOUGHT WE ALL WERE, THE CHILDREN OF GOD."*

***GOD HELP THE OUTCASTS, CHILDREN OF GOD.”***

**WHEN JESUS ANTICIPATES THE QUESTION THAT WILL BE ASKED OF THE DISCIPLES AS THEY RETRIEVE HIM A DONKEY TO RIDE ON PALM SUNDAY, HE ALSO ANTICIPATES THE OBEDIENCE OF THOSE DISCIPLES TO CARRY OUT HIS WISHES.**

**HE ANTICIPATES THE OBEDIENCE OF THE DONKEY’S OWNER TO HONOR HIS REQUEST.**

**HE KNOWS HE CAN COUNT ON THEM TO DO ALL THAT HE ASKS.**

**MAY HE COUNT ON YOU AS WELL.**

**MAY HE COUNT ON YOU TO GIVE AS HE GAVE – TO LOVE AS HE LOVED – TO SERVE AS HE SERVED.**

**THERE ARE OUTCASTS ALL AROUND US – THE POOR, THE HUNGRY, THE DOWNTRODDEN.**

**MAY WE BE FAITHFUL TO CHRIST IN OUR FAITHFULNESS TO THEM. AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Evansville, Indiana*