

Luke 19:28-40
March 28, '10
Palm Sunday

LENTEN LESSONS FROM LUKE
"PALM DUD DAY"

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE HIGHEST-RATED TELEVISION SPECIAL IN HISTORY IS?

IT WAS A TWO-HOUR LIVE BROADCAST THAT AIRED ON APRIL 21, 1986.

IT WAS "REALITY TV" LONG BEFORE ITS TIME.

SOME OF YOU MAY REMEMBER WATCHING IT.

IT WAS CALLED "THE SECRETS OF AL CAPONE'S VAULT."

THE SHOW WAS HOSTED BY GERALDO RIVERA.

IT WAS HYPED AS A SHOW THAT MIGHT REVEAL GREAT RICHES OR EVEN DEAD BODIES.

THEY HAD IRS AGENTS TO LAY CLAIM TO THE RICHES & A MEDICAL EXAMINER FOR THE BODIES.

WHAT WAS FOUND INSIDE THE VAULT WAS NOTHING BUT DIRT & A FEW EMPTY WHISKEY BOTTLES.

WHAT A DUD – PERHAPS THE GREATEST TV DUD EVER – WELL, UNTIL JAY LENO HAD HIS OWN PRIME-TIME SHOW.

IT PROMISED SO MUCH & DELIVERED NOTHING.

THERE ARE OTHER WELL-KNOWN DUDS.

SOME OF YOU WILL REMEMBER SOME OF THEM.

HOW ABOUT "NEW COKE" – "THE EDESEL" – "RYAN LEAF" — "ISHTAAR."

I SUPPOSE CONNIE CHUNG AS NIGHTLY NEWS ANCHOR OR CONAN O'BRIEN HOSTING "THE TONIGHT SHOW" WOULD ALSO FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF "DUD."

A DUD IS A PERSON OR AN EVENT THAT FAILS TO FULFILL HIGH EXPECTATIONS.

THE EVENT WE OBSERVE TODAY IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE.

WE CALL IT "PALM SUNDAY," BUT IN THE EYES OF THOSE WHO GATHERED IN JERUSALEM THAT DAY, IT WAS REALLY A "PALM DUD DAY."

WE MIGHT BE SO BOLD AS TO SAY THAT IT WASN'T ONLY THE EVENT BUT THE *PERSON* WHO WAS A DUD THAT DAY.

WHEN JESUS RODE INTO JERUSALEM ON A DONKEY IT WAS A TIME OF HIGH TENSION: THE PASSOVER WAS NEAR – A TIME WHEN RIOTS WERE COMMON – THE TERRORISM ALERT SYSTEM WOULD HAVE BEEN ON ORANGE OR EVEN RED.

JESUS HAD A REPUTATION AS A GREAT TEACHER & MOVING SPEAKER.

HE WAS SEEN AS A HEALER & MIRACLE WORKER.

HE WAS A CHARISMATIC FIGURE.

THE PEOPLE SHOUTED "*BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!*"

THEY KNEW WHAT THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH HAD SAID: "*LO, YOUR KING COMES TO YOU; TRIUMPHANT & VICTORIOUS IS HE, HUMBLE & RIDING ON A DONKEY...HE WILL CUT OFF THE CHARIOT FROM EPHRAIM & THE WAR HORSE FROM JERUSALEM & HE SHALL COMMAND PEACE TO THE NATIONS.*"

YOU SEE, EVERYONE – FRIEND & FOE ALIKE – WAS EXPECTING SOMETHING BIG TO HAPPEN THE DAY JESUS RODE THAT DONKEY INTO JERUSALEM.

AND, INSTEAD, IT TURNED OUT TO BE A REAL DUD.

HE DIDN'T SHOUT MARCHING ORDERS TO THE PEOPLE TO JOIN FORCES WITH HIM TO OVERTHROW THE HATED ROMANS.

HE DIDN'T OFFER WORDS OF STRENGTH & POWER.

IN FACT, HE DID QUITE THE OPPOSITE.

IN THE VERY NEXT VERSE AFTER THE FINAL ONE WE READ THIS MORNING, LUKE TELLS US JESUS LOOKED AT THE CITY OF JERUSALEM & HE WEPT.

DOESN'T SOUND MUCH LIKE A CONQUERING MILITARY HERO, DOES IT?

WE'RE LEFT VERY DISILLUSIONED BY IT ALL.

WE HAVE TO LOOK DEEPER TO UNDERSTAND IT.

WE CAN READ THE ACCOUNTS OF THIS EVENT IN THE GOSPELS & WE CAN LEARN WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY IN JERUSALEM.

BUT THE FACTS DON'T TELL US WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON & THERE'S A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.

I THINK THIS HAPPENS IN OUR OWN LIVES.

MOST OF YOU CAN THINK OF MOMENTS OF YOUR LIFE WHEN WHAT HAPPENED COULD BE EASILY DESCRIBED.

IT MAY HAVE BEEN A PERFECTLY NORMAL EVENT OR OCCURRENCE.

BUT WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON CHANGED THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE FOREVER.

PERHAPS YOU WERE AT A PARTY – A PARTY LIKE ANY OTHER.

IT WAS A PARTY THAT YOU'D BEEN TO COUNTLESS OTHER TIMES IN YOUR LIFE.

BUT THERE YOU MET SOMEONE WHO BECAME A LIFELONG FRIEND OR MAYBE EVEN YOUR HUSBAND OR WIFE.

OR MAYBE IT HAPPENED TO YOU ON A SUNDAY MORNING IN WORSHIP – SOMETHING YOU DO WEEK IN & WEEK OUT.

BUT ON THIS PARTICULAR SUNDAY MORNING, THERE WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

WHAT *HAPPENED* ISN'T THE SAME AS WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON.

THERE WAS SOMETHING GOING ON BEYOND THE MERE FACT THAT YOU WERE THERE.

MAYBE IT WAS A SENTENCE IN A SERMON - MAYBE JUST A THOUGHT OR A PHRASE.

MAYBE IT WAS THE MUSIC OR SOMETHING WITHIN A PRAYER.

WHATEVER IT WAS, IT CHANGED THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE.

IN THE WORLD INVISIBLE – THE WORLD OF THE SPIRIT – SOMETHING WAS GOING ON OF WHICH YOU HAD NO CLUE.

THERE WAS SOMETHING GOING ON IN JERUSALEM THAT DAY – SOMETHING FAR BEYOND THAT WHICH ANYONE BUT JESUS KNEW.

THE WORLD WAS BEING FOOLED BY HIM.

HE WASN'T GOING TO CONQUER IN THE WAY THAT CONQUERORS HAD ALWAYS DONE.

THE DISCIPLES WERE THERE.

THEY WERE LOYAL TO JESUS THAT DAY.

THEY WOULD GIVE HIM HIS DUE HONOR.

AFTER ALL, THE MOVEMENT WAS JUST STARTING TO ROLL.

AFTER WORKING AS A TEAM FOR NEARLY 3 YEARS THEY WERE FINALLY BEGINNING TO GEL.

MANY OF THEM HAD BEEN TOGETHER ALL THAT TIME.

OTHERS WERE JUST BEGINNING TO FOLLOW.

MANY IN THE GROUP WERE PROBABLY JUST CURIOUS, WHILE STILL OTHERS WERE SIMPLY LOOKING FOR COMPANIONS FOR THE JERUSALEM JOURNEY.

WHATEVER THEIR REASON FOR BEING PRESENT THAT DAY AS JESUS ENTERED JERUSALEM, THEY WERE OBVIOUSLY DELIGHTED TO BE PART OF THE PARTY.

THEY SANG.

THEY DANCED.

THEY SHOUTED & THEY LAUGHED.

THEY WERE BEHIND THE MASTER ALL THE WAY.

BUT THAT WAS SUNDAY – A SAFE DAY TO JOIN IN THE SINGING – A DAY WHEN ALL WERE SWEEPED ALONG FOR THE MOMENT AT THEIR CAREFREE, RECKLESS BEST.

BUT, OH, HOW QUICKLY THINGS CHANGE!

WHERE WERE THESE FOLLOWERS WHEN THE VOTE WAS TAKEN IN PILATE'S JUDGMENT HALL?

WHEN THE CROWD WAS SHOUTING FOR BARABBAS TO BE FREED INSTEAD OF JESUS, WHERE WERE THE SINGING, DANCING, SHOUTING & LAUGHING FOLLOWERS THEN?

IN ESSENCE, WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN, WHO CAME THROUGH?

NO ONE!

NOT A LIVING SOUL CRIED OUT IN DEFENSE OF JESUS FOLLOWING HIS ARREST.

THEIR SINGING TURNED TO SILENCE, THEIR DANCING INTO FEAR – THE SHOUTS BECAME A WHISPER & THE LAUGHTER BUT A TEAR.

YES, HOW QUICKLY THINGS CAN CHANGE!

THERE IS A SILENCE WHICH IS NOT GOLDEN.

IT IS THE SILENCE OF TIMIDITY & APATHY – THE SILENCE WHICH CRUCIFIES & ALLOWS TO BE CRUCIFIED.

THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN FOOLED BY JESUS.

THEY WERE EXPECTING AN EARTHLY KING & GOT THE KING OF THE WORLD INSTEAD.

THAT'S WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON THAT DAY.

GIVEN ALL THEIR EXPECTATIONS, THIS WAS, INDEED, A "PALM DUD DAY."

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW, JESUS PRONOUNCES JUDGMENT UPON JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM & THE TEMPLE.

HE COMES, SEEMINGLY, NOT TO FULFILL, BUT TO DASH THE HOPES OF ISRAEL.

YES, IN THAT REGARD, THIS WAS PALM DUD DAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM THAT DAY.

I THINK ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE THINGS ABOUT THIS IS THAT IT'S *STILL* A DUD DAY FOR US 2,000 YEARS LATER.

WE STILL HAVE EXPECTATIONS OF JESUS THAT HE DOESN'T MEET.

AND YET HE STILL COMES TO US.

HE COMES TO DASH OUR HOPES & SHATTER OUR DREAMS.

“NO!” WE CRY. “THAT CAN’T BE. HE CAME TO FULFILL THOSE HOPES & DREAMS!”

NO, HE CAME TO SHATTER THEM AND – LISTEN TO THIS – THE FACT THAT HE *DID* IS CAUSE FOR GREAT REJOICING!
IN CHRIST, WE ARE SET FREE FROM OUR CHILDISH HOPES, OUR SELFISH DREAMS & OUR MISGUIDED YEARNINGS.
WE ARE SET FREE FROM THE TYRANNY OF OUR OWN DESIRES.

CHRIST COMES – NOT TO SATISFY OUR HOPES – BUT TO TRANSFORM THEM.

HE COMES – NOT TO FULFILL OUR DREAMS – BUT TO AWAKEN US TO A HIGHER CALLING.

TO BELIEVE IN HIM, TO ACCEPT HIM AS LORD, IS TO BE DELIVERED FROM THE FEAR THAT WE LIVE IN A WORLD
WITHOUT HOPE & VOID OF MEANING.

TO BELIEVE IN HIM IS TO BE DELIVERED FROM ANY PRIVATE HELL INTO WHICH YOU HAVE SUNK.

TO BELIEVE IN HIM IS TO BE SHOWN THAT HUMILITY & SERVICE TO OTHERS ARE NO TRIVIAL PURSUIT, BUT A
RESPONSE TO A LOVE THAT BEATS IN THE HEART OF GOD.

IT IS SO HARD, THOUGH, TO MOVE BEYOND OUR OWN SELF-SERVING AMBITIONS & LOOK AROUND US TO THOSE
WHO ARE POOR & POWERLESS, OPPRESSED & EXPLOITED.

IT’S HARD BECAUSE THE WORLD TELLS US IT’S FOLLY.

WE DON’T HAVE TO LOOK VERY FAR TO HEAR THE VOICES THAT REJECT THE CALL OF CHRIST TO SERVANTHOOD.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE TELEVISION & RADIO ENTERTAINER WHO RECENTLY ADVISED CHRISTIANS WHO
HEARD THE WORDS “SOCIAL JUSTICE” IN THEIR CHURCH TO – AS HE PUT IT – “*RUN. RUN AS FAR AWAY AS YOU CAN.*”

IF IT WEREN’T THE TRUTH THAT SOMEONE ACTUALLY SAID THAT, IT WOULD BE LAUGHABLE.

IT’S LAUGHABLE BECAUSE THE GUY’S A MEMBER OF A RELIGION THAT REJECTS CHRIST – OF COURSE HE’S GOING
TO REJECT THE BASIC MESSAGE JESUS CAME TO PROCLAIM!

HE DOESN’T UNDERSTAND IT!

HE DOESN’T GET IT!

HE WANTS PEOPLE TO LOOK OUT FOR THEMSELVES – NOT OTHERS.

HE THINKS THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS SHOULD REJECT THE CROSS & THE CALL TO SERVANTHOOD.

HE’S NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN JERUSALEM 2,000 YEARS AGO WHO THOUGHT IT WAS A PALM DUD DAY
BECAUSE JESUS DIDN’T OVERTHROW THE ROMANS.

THE ONLY WAY TO THROW OUT “SOCIAL JUSTICE” FROM OUR CHURCHES IS TO THROW OUT VIRTUALLY EVERY
PAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE GOSPELS, TO PAUL, TO JAMES, AND ALL THE WAY TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION
& IN THE PROCESS, TO THROW OUT THE VERY MESSAGE CHRIST CAME TO PROCLAIM.

IT’S REMINDS ME OF A STORY I HEARD A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO ABOUT A FILM EDITOR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY
WHO WAS ASKED TO EDIT “THE SOUND OF MUSIC” BECAUSE IT WAS TOO LONG.

HE SOLVED THE PROBLEM BY TAKING OUT ALL THE SONGS!

BUT WHAT’S “THE SOUND OF MUSIC” WITHOUT THE SONGS!

IT’S THE HEART OF THE MOVIE!

WHAT’S THE GOSPEL WITHOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE?

IT’S THE HEART OF WHAT CHRIST PROCLAIMED!

YES, IT'S HARD TO ACCEPT THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST BECAUSE THE WORLD DESPERATELY WANTS US TO REJECT IT.
TO THOSE IN JERUSALEM THAT DAY 2,000 YEARS AGO & TO THOSE OF THE 21ST CENTURY WHO WANT A RELIGION
THAT'S SELF-RIGHTEOUS & SELF-SERVING, THIS DAY WAS SURELY A DUD.

BUT FOR THOSE UNDERSTAND – OR ARE EVEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND – IT WASN'T A DUD, BUT A BUD.

IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT FLOWER OF SPRING JUST COMING TO LIFE – JUST BEGINNING TO OPEN UP & PRESENT ALL
THE MAGNIFICENT POSSIBILITIES OF A LIFE OF LOVE & SERVICE, GRACE & TENDERNESS.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRYING DESPERATELY TO GET IT, IT WASN'T A DUD, BUT A FLOOD.

IT WAS A TRICKLE OF LIVING WATER, LOOKING FOR DROPS TO JOIN THE FLOW THROUGH THE CENTURIES TO
PRODUCE A TORRENT OF WHAT AMOS PROCLAIMED WHEN HE SAID, *“LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATERS &
RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE AN EVER-FLOWING STREAM.”*

AS WE GO THROUGH THESE DAYS OF WHAT WE CALL “HOLY WEEK,” MAY WE REJOICE THAT OUR HOPES & DREAMS
ARE DASHED BY CHRIST & REPLACED BY HOPES & DREAMS OF TRANSFORMATION & A MUCH HIGHER CALLING IN OUR LIVES.

AMEN.

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

