

“What did they See/What do we See?”

Luke 19:28-40

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Palm Sunday Service

What do you see when you come to church on Sunday?

Do you see friends?

- Do you see familiar surroundings?

Do you see customary ways of worshipping God;

- ways of worshipping God
 - that comfortably accommodate
 - your personal preferences
 - and your way of seeing the world?

PAUSE HERE

When I first started as pastor

for another congregation,

- I asked some of the guys at our first men's group meeting,
 - “What is the reason you come to church?”

I got as many different answers to that question

- as there were men
 - at the meeting that morning.

I am sure that if we took the time now,

- to ask and answer that same question,
 - “What is the reason you come to church?”
 - We would also hear
 - as many different answers
 - as there are people here

- this morning.

The point is,

we each have our own unique reasons

- for doing the things we do;
- including coming to church.

This is so, because we are each uniquely individual.

Our experiences in this life,

- our experiences **of** this life,
- have happened only to us.

And these unique experiences in life

- inform how each of us sees life,
- and therefore,
 - how each of us responds
 - to life itself.

The fact is, each of our unique life experiences,

- inform how we see our subsequent life events.

Our unique life experiences

also inform how we view

the people we encounter in life,

including Jesus.

Our life experiences inform what we see

- when we look upon Jesus' face;
- in our daily lives
 - and in our worship time.

PAUSE HERE

The people standing on the outskirts of Jerusalem

- the day Jesus came to town
- were individuals just like us.

Each person there,

- was standing looking at Jesus,
 - watching as the event of his entry
 - into Jerusalem unfolded.

Each one was watching what happened that day

- from a perspective that was formed in them
 - by the past experiences of their lives.

Take for example, the property owners,

specifically, the folks who owned the donkey.

No doubt they initially saw Jesus' disciples

as potential donkey thieves.

These people,

these property owners,

- saw Jesus' arrival as a threat
 - to their physical goods.

"Why are you untying our donkey?"

- It doesn't belong to you.
 - And we need it to earn our living,"
 - they said.

Then there were the leaders of the temple.

These folks saw Jesus' noisy entry into Jerusalem as a threat;

- as the threat of a potential riot;
 - a riot that would endanger
 - their privileged position in society
 - because they failed to keep the peace
 - for their Roman over-lords.

"Tell your disciples to shut up."

- They said,
 - "Or the Romans will come and shut them up.

- And we will end up being kicked out of
 - our positions of power and privilege
 - in the temple and the community
 - because you failed
 - to quiet everyone down
 - and keep the peace.”

Then there were the people in the crowd.

They were elated to see Jesus come to town.

These folks were quite literally dying

- to get rid of their Roman overlords.

These happy people saw Jesus' arrival

as the coming of their messiah,

their long-promised deliverer.

They expressed their joy at his coming

by throwing their coats on the ground before him.

John tells this same story

saying some of the people took palm fronds,

and went out to wave them before Jesus.

At the time,

palm fronds were a political symbol

for the Zealots,

the Jewish resistance movement

who wanted to overthrow

their Roman occupiers

with physical force.

“Hosanna,” they said,

- “Here at last is our king
 - the one we know will lead us

- in a successful military revolt against Rome.”

There was also a fourth group present there that day.

These folks were following Jesus

because they had an inkling

of what he was about.

They had witnessed the signs and wonders performed by Jesus.

The miraculous feedings.

The miracle healings.

The raisings of the dead.

And they were beginning to see in the one

who performed these signs and wonders,

not a meal ticket or a political saviour,

but something, someone

completely different

from all their previous life experiences.

These folks were there that day

because they were beginning to see Jesus

as the first fruits of the new thing

God was doing in him for humanity.

These folks saw in Jesus

the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God

amongst all peoples.

PAUSE HERE

Each of the four groups of people

we have described

- saw Jesus' entry into Jerusalem differently
- because they each had different life experiences.

Life experiences that created in them

- an agenda that they hoped Jesus
 - would live into
 - and cooperate with
 - and promote.

The property owners in town

- wanted Jesus to keep his hands off their stuff.

They wanted him to not interfere with

the local economy,

to not mess with their livelihoods.

The religious power brokers in the city

- wanted Jesus to keep quiet
 - and not upset
 - their way of doing things.

These religious and political

- movers and shakers
 - wanted Jesus to leave them alone
 - so they could remain on top of
 - the social pecking order
 - and keep everyone else in bondage
 - to the current religious and political systems
 - that favoured them.

On the other hand

many in the crowd,

wanted just the opposite

they hoped for

a revolutionary leader.

They wanted a demagogue

- who would completely overthrow
 - the current political and religious order

- that kept them in bondage.
- And then we have those
who were beginning to see Jesus
for who he truly was.

PAUSE HERE

So we see, everyone in that crowd wanted someone,

- anyone,
 - as long as that someone
 - solved the problems
 - that they were experiencing
 - in their life.

It is important to notice here

that each group wanted their problems in life solved.

But not for the benefit of others

- or for the benefit of the society they lived in.

But rather so they could be free to live life

exactly the way they thought

their life should be lived.

Everyone there that day

- saw Jesus' coming to town
 - and they each saw his coming differently.

Everyone there that day had something they wanted from Jesus.

- They each wanted Jesus to behave in ways
 - that satisfied only their needs;
 - that fulfilled their personal agendas.

And their desires for the fulfilment

- of their individual needs
 - were the reasons they each had

- for coming to stand there in Jesus' presence,
 - watching hopefully
 - as he rode that donkey
 - toward his death on the cross.

PAUSE HERE

And what about us?

- Why are we here today?
 - What brought us here today?

What do we hope to see

- when we come to church
 - to watch the Jesus' parade?

What do we hope to receive from Jesus
on this Palm Sunday?

If, as I expect,

you are here today
out of a desire to grow
in your discipleship to Jesus,

I invite you to reflect on where you stand
on these questions.

Do we stand with the property owners?

Do we want Jesus to justify

- our need to acquire and hang onto
 - our worldly goods,
 - regardless of the needs of others?

Or do we stand with the temple leaders?

Are we more interested

- in maintaining the status quo of how we worship,
 - than we are in being open

- to the new thing that God in Jesus
 - is doing in our midst
 - and in our community?

Do we care about those

- who do not find a connection to Jesus
 - in the way we have become accustomed
 - to worshipping God?

Or is it our strong desire

- that Jesus not rock our religious boat?
 - That Jesus would allow us to carry on
 - just as things are
 - while the hope for the future
 - of the ministry of this congregation fades
 - as each of us dies
 - or descends into dementia
 - or debilitation?

Or maybe we stand with those in the crowd

who were looking for a revolution?

Are we like those,

- who expect Jesus to solve all
 - our social and political problems
 - so we can carry on living
 - exactly the way we want to live?

Even if the way we live

- is destroying the planet we live on
 - through political conflict,
 - warfare,
 - and the convenience of intentional ignorance

- about things like climate change?

Are we, like the crowd,

- hoping for Jesus' to endorse the way we live,
 - even when the way we choose to live
 - is stealing the hope for a better life,
 - from the lives of those
 - who are not like us?

When we sang Hosanna in church this morning,

- were we praising God in Christ,
 - for coming into the world to free us
 - from our bondage to living in sin?

When glad Hosannas came from our mouths,

- were we thanking God for coming in Jesus
 - to set us free from
 - our distorted ways of seeing life?

Or were we singing Hosanna

- to bolster our hope
 - that God in Jesus,
 - came to serve us the way
 - we want to be served,
 - indeed the way WE
 - deserve to, be served.

Are we open to what God wants to show us

- through the life, death and resurrection
 - of His Son Jesus?

Or do we want to see in Jesus

- only a god that we can keep
 - under careful
 - cultural control,

so he safely serves
or personal agendas?

When we stand in the congregation of a Sunday morning,

- do we secretly want to see a god
 - that we can control
 - by our intellects?

A god we can keep carefully guarded,

- there in our heads.

So our hearts and souls

don't have to be awoken

by the mystery of the Holy Spirit

and SO become alive and responsive

to the movement

of God's grace in our lives?

When we come to worship,

- are we hoping to find here a god
 - that won't ask us to open our hearts
 - so God's grace can begin to help us
 - reinterpret our life experiences
 - in the light of God's love
 - for YOU AND FOR the world?

PAUSE HERE

Or when we come before our God in worship,

- are we hoping to find the God of Power and Might,
 - the One who entered into this world
 - to suffer and die
 - so that we might live abundantly
 - in service to the Kingdom of God

- that Jesus ushered into this world?

When we gather to look upon Jesus' face

do we see in His visage

the True and Living God with the power

- to help us reinterpret our lives
 - through the leading of the Holy Spirit
 - so the Christ of God
 - can gently begin forming us
 - into his very likeness?

Which of these choices

- which of these ways of seeing Jesus
 - are your hope
 - when you come to church?

Which of these hopes do you see

- God's grace enacting for you,
 - and in you,
 - as you stand with others
 - and watch the Jesus parade
 - on a Sunday morning?

Amen.