

Two Things That Lead To Peace

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

Our Gospel lesson for today comes to us about 4-5 months late. It springs from a time in Jesus' life and ministry when all hell was about to break loose around Him. This passage from Luke 19 comes in the midst of the events of Palm Sunday, Jesus entry into Jerusalem.

I'm sure you know the story of how, just prior to this, two disciples were sent to procure a colt for Jesus to ride as He entered the city. Jesus then rode towards Jerusalem as the masses showed their adoration by laying their coats and palm branches along the road before Him. You remember how the crowd shouted with enthusiasm, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" Many a pastor spends each Palm Sunday recounting various aspects of that story. But few continue the passage's discourse.

But it is what followed next that I would like to address today. The gospel of Luke describes it this way:

Luke 19:41-42 **When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it,** ⁴² **saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.**

Try to put yourself in that situation for just a moment. Your favorite celebrity, political figure, or preacher is coming to town. You can't wait for their arrival. But in this case it's all three wrapped into one (*think Martin Luther King, Jr; Gandhi; or the Dalai Lama*). You can't believe your good fortune; to be at that place, at that time. The world, or at least your little corner of it, may never be the same.

The situation in Jesus' day wasn't unlike our own. Those were tumultuous days; times when hearts were sad and spirits broken. Conflict and strife were common around the world. And sadly, some of those clashes were in Jesus' own nation of Israel. But at this moment, the "Hope of Israel" was coming down the road to town, but few could actually recognize it.

It's ironic how many of the voices screaming for peace belong to people who rebel violently in the streets and then claim it's their inherent right to do so. It saddens me to hear of people who so sincerely want peace, but obviously don't know what, or who, will truly bring it.

You see, we can force "tolerance" upon a classroom, and punish acts of bigotry or prejudice at the workplace. But not even our best advancements in medical technology can replace our prideful, sin-sick hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 **"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.**

Jesus is the only real Maker of Peace.

This's exactly what impacted Jesus as he paused outside of Jerusalem all those centuries ago. He wept as He said, "*If you had known in this day, even you, the things*

which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes."

When they looked at Jesus, most in that crowd saw a powerful liberator, a social force to bring escape from Roman rule and a nationalistic restoration for a downtrodden people. Jesus' spiritual strengths were a side benefit; they gave support and credence to His political authority.

But the masses, just like today, had it all wrong. Jesus' true power and influence were in His spiritual authority and ministry. Any social sway He might have possessed followed in the wake of the transformation He brought spiritually. What the people didn't realize was that Jerusalem as a city, and Israel as a nation, would only know peace when the *Prince of Peace* was on the throne of each person's heart. And that's still true today, both for Israel and America.

The truth of the matter is this. As badly as we desire a peaceful and unified nation, it cannot come about as long as we are a nation separated from God. There is no law we can pass that will stifle our pride and selfishness. No pill has been, or will be developed, that can remove arrogance and a desire for control from the human heart.

Only Jesus Christ can do that; if we humble ourselves before Him, allowing the Holy Spirit to do the necessary spiritual surgery. Only then can we truly want, and work for peace, in our nation and abroad.

What we need is not a restored nationalism, not the same old political rhetoric, but a spiritual revival back to God. Harmony amongst people won't come by waving banners and shouting peace slogans in one another's faces. Lasting peace can only come to a person, or nation, where there has been a real transformation by Christ.

Peace returns as a relationship with God is restored

There is a verse from Proverbs 15 that says, "*A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken* (v. 13). That statement was true in Jesus' day, and it is just as applicable to our times as well.

When we are hopeful for the future, when we're encouraged by the direction of our lives, we're happy, and our lives, our very faces, reflect that optimism. But when hope is removed, when we see no light at the end of the tunnel, it's hard to put on that happy face. We're downcast, dejected; and often our hopelessness shows itself in anger and contempt.

That's exactly what happened throughout Jerusalem all those years ago. Right on the heels of Jesus' tearful statement about the people's blindness, He declares some of the trouble to befall them because of their separation from God. He then goes about doing a little spring cleaning to drive home the true intention of His ministry.

Luke 19:43 **"For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, 44 and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize**

the time of your visitation." 45 Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN."

In the midst of this triumphal entry into the city, Luke's account of Jesus' ministry takes a sudden turn. The people are welcoming Him as their liberator and king, their savior of sorts, and Jesus is declaring their impending destruction. His implication is that they had their chance and they missed it. Their egocentric goals, nationalistic pride, and spiritual blindness had consumed their perspectives; leaving them unable to see the real priority (*impending destruction*) and their deepest need (*faith in God*).

And then to add further confusion, He goes into the temple and starts cleaning house. This Liberator was to attack and remove Roman tyranny, and here He is going crazy in the temple. Sure, the people were being abused by their own leadership; they were being gouged by their own priests. But wasn't this minor in comparison to Roman oppression?

The people should have gotten the point that Jesus' priority was spiritual cleansing and renewal. But instead, they could only see His meddling and misdirected anger; especially when egged on by the religious leaders. Oh, the tide of Jesus' support remained high for a few days as He healed the sick and spoke openly against the abuses of the religious leadership. But it soon became clear that Jesus wasn't moving in a direction that satisfied the crowd; He wasn't attacking Roman rule, and was speaking more openly about His own unique identity and divine relationship and mission.

Luke 20:17 But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER {stone}'? 18 "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Luke 20:41-44 Then He said to them, "How {is it that} they say the Christ is David's son? "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" "Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?"

Luke 21:27 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory.

Luke 21:33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

The sad truth is that the people had all the information they needed right in front of them. The problem wasn't a lack of data; it was their flawed view of it. They were blind to Jesus' true nature and mission. They thought the prize was material and environmental peace; a condition that could be enforced by social action and political force.

But this is never God's remedy. This is not to say that believers shouldn't take their faith to every corner of society with a goal in mind of transformation. They should!

But we must never lose sight of the fact that real and lasting peace is not a result of our political maneuvering, our boycotts, or our community activism.

Authentic regeneration happens when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, enters the heart of the lost by way of God's Holy Spirit empowered Word. When believers get their eyes on the real prize (*the peace that passes all understanding through Christ*), while speaking and living in accordance with God's truth, then real community and national change can come. May we be driven by the Prince of Peace, with a passion to bring that peace to the far reaches of our world. And may we understand that true peace doesn't come through superficial actions or material initiatives, but by each person walking in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.