

April 5, 2009

Bakersfield, CA

Mark 15:1-39

Enter in Triumph, Exit in Tragedy

The delight and joy of a triumphal entry is wonderfully displayed by children waving palm branches. Jesus was acclaimed as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey (Mark 11:1-11). People shouted and waved and hailed Him as heaven sent. By all external measures the day was a successful one for Jesus. Yet success is a terribly imprecise business. We could all be more clear about our own definition of success, lest it become even more elusive. Many of us may know the burden of having to live under the saddle of other people's definitions of success for us. Jesus knew this; but also knew who he was and where he was going. His triumphal entry was an ironic event, for by the end of that very week he was condemned to death.

Those who waved palm branches spoke the truth, yet they themselves failed to perceive what that truth really was. The "Hosannas" of the beginning of the week are echoed by shouts of "Crucify him!" before week's end. Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly and left in a casket. I do not mention this to throw cold water on our Palm Sunday celebration, but to set the record straight. The full report must be given. In the Church's calendar this is Palm and Passion Sunday. Today, we must recognize that the joyous "Hosannas" of his entrance, became the vindictive cries of "Crucify him!" that announced his exit. How did it happen? How could anyone let it happen like that? Yet we should know, for it happens today. Let us see, learn and understand, as we follow this story.

He had entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover week. A few days later, on the first day of Passover Jesus ... *sent out two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs furnished and ready. Make preparations there"* (Mark 14:13). One of the most memorable and important times the disciples would have with their Teacher (the Passover meal - Last Supper), hinged on the obedience of these two. They could well have thought, oh we can find a room ourselves, and probably save some money. Sometimes God will lead us to do things that we will not completely understand until after we have done them. He will tell us enough to implement what he has said. Our response will affect what God does next in our lives. Our obedience may affect how others experience Christ. If there is an area in your life where you have not yet obeyed God's will, do so now; so that he can lead you to greater fulfillment.¹

On the night of Passover they all gathered there in that upper room. *Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me"* (Mark 14:18). He spoke the unthinkable, and each disciple was certain that he would never betray the Master. Yet, during the intense pressures of Gethsemane and the cross, the disciples did things they never thought they would do. They had not realized how hateful the world could be toward their Teacher, and that the world would hate them as well.

How quickly we can find our surroundings shifting from the security of a warm shared time with the Lord, to the harsh reality of an unredeemed world. We must guard our hearts and listen to our Lord's gentle warning.

¹Henry T. Blackaby & Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-By-Day*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 81.

If failure was possible with His first disciples, it is possible for you and me. Yes, we are capable of forsaking Jesus. If He is warning you of an area in you life in which you could fail him, heed His words today.²

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (Mark 14:22-24). And even today he offers himself for us - in this meal we share in His name and power. He offers His own mighty presence to be with us. If He is prompting you to share a meal with Him, I mean to really commune with Him, you must not withhold yourself.

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:26). As we follow Jesus, we will likely face moments of distress. It may appear that things conspire to make us stumble in our relationship with Him. Christ is and will be attacked by all manner of people. One of the reasons it is so important that we gather around His communion table and then share our faith struggles with one another, is that alone we can so easily fall away from Him. Challenges to our hope in His power can be intimidating. The disciples faced such fierce opposition to the Lord that they failed Him on the night He was arrested. We know how Peter denied Jesus three times. But recall also that later, the risen Jesus did not ask Peter for a confession of sin, but a confession of love (John 21:15-17). Do not think that somehow your failures are bigger or more complex than any God has dealt with. If you are facing great challenges, don't be discouraged. God has already foreseen them and prepared for them (1 Cor. 10:13).³

Then He said, *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee"* (Mark 14:28). God never sends us into a situation alone. He always goes before his children, as He did with the children of Israel, leading them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, going through the Sinai desert. God goes before you, stands behind you, and walks beside you. When you face great difficulties, or a dark night of the soul, as a child of God rest in the knowledge that your Savior is alive and has gone before you in triumph.⁴ This is our hope.

We all have hope... or so we say. We hope that misery or discontent will be taken away. We hope that starvation and unemployment will disappear. We hope that all people, including ourselves, may be happy and free; that we might live a simple, more honest, a purer human life. We hope, don't we? Hope . . . hope can so often be betrayed just at the point of its realization. Can it be that hope is betrayed by our selves?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, there on the Mount of Olives, He became distressed and agitated. He threw himself on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, *Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want"* (Mark 14:35-36).

[He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch!" (Mark 14:33b-34). Who can know the depth and intensity of the heart of God? We can begin to understand what is on the heart of God when He shares His heart with us (Amos 3:7). Jesus is a window into the heart of

²Ibid, 82.

³Ibid, 86.

⁴Ibid, 91.

God. He took delight in young children (Luke 18:15-16). He had compassion for a woman living in sin (John 4:27). He wept at the hopelessness of those facing death, even though he had the power to raise the dead (John 11:1-44). We can choose to be alert to the heart of God. When we see others suffering, we may feel the compassion Jesus feels. When sinners return to God in repentance, we may share the Father's joy. We will react to evil the way Jesus reacts. If we remain alert in prayer, Jesus will share His heart with us.^{5]}

[*He went a little farther and fell on the ground and prayed* (Mark 14:35). Some Christians are satisfied to have only a surface relationship with Christ. Others desire to share in the holiest moments. God is calling you to go deeper in your prayer life with Him. If you will trust Him and are willing to be transformed by Him, Jesus can take you into moments as only the angels shared with him that night in the garden of Gethsemane.^{6]}

[*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation* (Mark 14:38). The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. At times our spirits must demand supremacy over our flesh. Our spirits will know what the Lord has for us to do, but our flesh cries out for its own fulfillment. Jesus may ask us to pray with Him, and we may have to deny our physical needs in order to pray. We may have to leave the comfort of our beds or homes. We may even have to give up safety in order to be with Him. Yet when our Lord commands you to "watch and pray" it is crucial to obey, so that you may accomplish what He asks of you.^{7]}

[*Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough!"* (Mark 14:41a). How these words from the Master must have stung those disciples. "It is enough!" They were given the opportunity to share a sacred moment with Jesus, and they missed it. Jesus forgave them, and they went on to experience God working powerfully through their lives, but that unique moment with their Lord was lost. We too, will receive unique opportunities to serve the Lord. He may ask us to join Him as He works in the life of a friend, co-worker, or family member. If we are preoccupied with our own needs, we will miss the blessing of that opportunity. The loss is ours (God has legions of angels to do His bidding), as we miss what God wants to do in our lives. When God speaks, respond immediately. His will for you is perfect.^{8]}

He awoke his disciples (who had fallen asleep as He prayed) just as the leaders and an armed crowd came to arrest Him. He said, "... *let the scriptures be fulfilled.*" *All of them deserted Him and fled* (Mark 14:49b-50). There are dark times in life when the only comfort we may find is a word from God. Jesus faced a cruel and hostile world, made all the more painful when His closest friends deserted him. Yet He found comfort in recalling Scripture, just as he had in the desert, when He was tempted by Satan. Scripture assured Him that God was in control. The word of God is here to guide us; especially in times of distress, fear, or confusion. If you immerse yourself daily in the word of God, you will not be caught off guard when crises arise. Your focus will already be on God, and He will guide you safely through.^{9]}

At the critical moment, over there in Jerusalem, around Jesus and his hope; at the very moment when transformation seemed possible, people realized it was a risk. You know what you have; you don't know what

⁵Ibid, 83.

⁶Ibid, 84.

⁷Ibid, 85.

⁸Ibid, 87.

⁹Ibid, 88.

you're getting into. The streets emptied, doors, closed, windows were shut and the "Hosannas" were heard no more as a new chant arose, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I wonder if that is not what very often happens to us when we face the possibility of a conversion in our life. We close the windows and doors to Him, and go along with the chant of the crowd.

We know how the rest of the story goes. Jesus was tried, found guilty; then scourged and led out to Golgotha (the place of skulls), where he was crucified, between two thieves.

Perhaps the disciples remembered then what He had taught them: *Most assuredly I say to you, unless grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it produces much grain* (John 12:24). Some things must die in order to be productive. Certain seeds will not germinate unless they freeze during winter. Jesus knew that His death would bring salvation to the world. The moment you confessed Christ as your Savior, your sinful nature died (Rom. 6:6), but there remained sinful aspects of your character that had not gone to their graves willingly. Before you became a Christian were you self-centered? You may find selfishness lingering in your life when you could be freely sharing what you have in the name of Christ (Matt. 10:8). Did you have a bad temper before? Now, as a believer, you may find that anger wells up in you sometimes. Were you driven by ambition? You may still find yourself striving for recognition and position - even in the kingdom of God. If these sinful attitudes are allowed to remain alive, they will stifle the fruit of the Spirit. Selfishness will prevent you from being a blessing to those around you. Uncontrolled anger will prevent you from coming to Jesus. Your ambition could cause you to use others to meet your goals. Your family may be suffering, or be limited, because of some areas of your life that you have never allowed Jesus to put to death. It is foolish to say, "But that's just the way I am!" That is the way you were. But that person died with Christ; you are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Allow God to complete His transforming work in you and see what fruit your life produces.¹⁰

Come to His table this morning trusting in his promise, "... after I have been raised, I will go before you..."

¹⁰Ibid, 93.