

STATIONS OF HOLY WEEK: THE ROAD INTO JERUSALEM

Text: Luke 19:28-40
LHUMC 4/13/14

- I. Introduction
 - A. Here we are—at our first station of Holy Week—where the story begins, this road into Jerusalem. This is an important place in light of the story that we'll hear over the next couple of weeks. And generally speaking, roads were important back in Jesus' time—in that rocky and mountainous country, there had to be good roads between the towns and cities.
 - B. Back in Advent, we traveled some roads then too—the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph and then a couple of weeks later, the road to Egypt with the couple and their new-born baby as they tried to escape the wrath of King Herod.
 - C. There are many important roads in the Bible, especially in the gospels, because Jesus was almost always on the road from one place to another, or telling stories about people on the road (remember the Good Samaritan?)
 - D. I remember one of my teachers used to say the theme song of the gospels should be "On the Road Again".
 - E. Actually, this winter I've realized that good roads are always important, as I plan my entire trips around town to try to avoid first the roads that weren't plowed and now all the potholes.
- II. A few words about this road itself:
 - A. What we've recreated here is the end of the 20-mile road from Jericho to here in Jerusalem.
 - B. On its way, it passes through the villages of Bethphage and Bethany (where the donkey came from).
 - C. And then it goes up and over the Mount of Olives, and through the Kidron Valley to where we are today, right outside the main gate, also known as the Golden Gate. (show map)
 - D. Like most of the roads in the area, it was built by the Romans (so maybe there's a certain irony that the Messiah of the people that the Romans loved to persecute arrived into town on a road that they built.)
 - E. But give the Romans credit—they were master civil engineers, so it was a good road, a main road—no potholes on this road, for the Romans weren't only famous for building roads, but also for maintaining them.

(so maybe there's also a kind of irony that the roads Jesus traveled were better than ours!)

- F. We've added the palm trees (from which the people were getting their palms to wave)
 - G. The other thing that Jesus mentions only in Luke's version are these stones—and they weren't any stones--he says in response to the Pharisees that were on his case that if he silenced the crowd, "even these stones would cry out." You could call them "shouting stones"
 - 1. I always think "Shouting stones, really? "Would they really cry out?"
 - 2. But with Jesus in charge of the parade, you never know!
 - H. So picture the scene—Here is how one historian describes it: "As Jesus came over the brow of the Mount of Olives on that first Palm Sunday, the glorious city created by Herod the Great rose before him on the heights across the Kidron Valley. After a descent into the valley, there was the slow winding climb up to the Golden Gate, through which Jesus entered the sacred precincts of the Temple." (*Reader's Digest Atlas of the Bible*, p. 186)
- III. So if that's what the road was like in a physical, geographical sense, what was the atmosphere alongside this road that day, when Jesus came riding into town?
- A. Well, first of all, it should be pointed out that this road had hosted its share of parades.
 - 1. As the main road into town coming into the main gate, the truth is that whenever a top ruler or general or politician came to town, it would have been on this road.
 - 2. And the Romans knew how to throw a parade—if someone like Pontius Pilate was returning to town after a trip somewhere, there would have been a real parade—with horses and chariots and soldiers and all the rest.
 - B. So with that in mind, it's also safe to say that this road had never quite seen a parade quite like this one.
 - 1. A parade led by a guy on a donkey? Are you kidding me?
 - 2. As I think I've said before on this Sunday, the modern analogy would be that while Pilate would have rode into town on the ancient equivalent of a tank, here comes Jesus, riding into town on a Cub Cadet.
 - 3. Even though the prophet Zechariah foretold it, it still wasn't very cool to lead a parade riding on a donkey.

4. If nothing else, Jesus was giving the people the first of many Holy Week clues that he wasn't going to be the kind of King or Messiah that they were expecting or hoping for.
- C. And then there are the palm branches and the cloaks spread out on this road.
1. This whole scene seems strange to us—of all the parades I've been to, I've never seen anyone throwing their coats on the road in front of the lead car in the parade (or certainly not when there are horses in the parade).
 2. And we also are not in the habit of throwing greenery in the road either.
 3. Back then, it was normal behavior—spreading branches and cloaks in the road was a sign of respect toward the main character of the parade.
 4. And I will give the people some credit—it's one thing to spread palm branches in the road, it's another thing to spread your coat. To do that suggests a certain willingness to sacrifice something for the cause of the king who is leading the parade.
- D. And then it would have been very noisy, with great cheering, as people joined the parade.
1. The other thing I've never seen at any parade I've ever been to is this kind of cheering.
 2. Has anyone here ever shouted Bible verses at a parade?
 3. Because that's what they were doing—It's Psalm 118 that reads like this: "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! ("Hosanna" is the word meaning "save us") "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 4. The point is that they really believed (and rightly so) that the Messiah had finally come—and here he was.
 5. They were willing to look past the whole donkey thing to a great hope that this just has to be the one whom God has sent to deliver us from the persecution of the Romans!
 6. But you could also say that the noise of the crowd that day along side this road was a sign of how much they didn't get it.
 7. For my sense is that if they'd known how the story was going to play out over the next few days, they wouldn't have been shouting, they wouldn't have been waving palms, and they certainly wouldn't have laid their coats on the road.
 8. The atmosphere would have been very different if they had known that.

9. You even wonder how many would have shown up for the parade if they'd known the immediate fate of the one leading it.
- IV. So if that's what it was like, what do we gain today by being alongside this road, re-creating in our worship through songs and skits and scripture one more time the Palm Sunday story? Particularly knowing as we do the rest of the story, with this gift of 20-20 hindsight that we have a couple of thousand years later. A couple of things that I hope we can bring to this scene that those who there the first time weren't able to:
- A. A knowledge that waving palms and spreading cloaks and even shouting "hosanna" may not be enough.
 1. If anything, what we can learn that from the first Holy Week, when all of these people who were here doing those things is that it's relatively easy to praise Jesus when everything is going well, but when the chips are down, it may be not so easy.
 2. Like that first crowd, we all love a parade, we're not so sure about a trial.
 3. It was the folks in that first crowd that lined the road when Jesus entered town that were the same ones a few days later who were shouting "crucify him".
 4. When our faith is tested, when who Jesus is for us is called into question, then it takes more than just waving palms.
 5. At those moments, we praise Jesus most by simply standing up for him in whatever way he calls us to—which is what that first crowd was unable or unwilling to do.
 6. And living in the world we do, we see Jesus on trial all the time.
 7. And so it may be simply by reaching out to the ones the world has forgotten in some way that we stand up for Jesus, praising him in a way that really means something.
 8. When it comes to praising Jesus and living out our faith, going to the parade is the fun part, but there are also times when we have to put our faith in action, even in hard ways.
 - B. The second thing that hopefully we can bring to this road this time around is a better understanding of what kind of king this is who first rode into town on a donkey.
 1. The gospels are full of misunderstandings about what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be (before, during, and after Holy Week).
 2. And we can't really blame people for those misunderstandings.

- a) For it was taught from early on within the Jewish tradition that when God's chosen one finally appeared, he would be a great warrior who would take on those who oppressed the people.
 - b) And when that Messiah came, he would rule with supreme authority, and the world would never be the same again.
3. And so that's what the people were hoping for at that first parade into town.
 4. And for a day at least, they were willing to overlook that he was riding on a donkey, and place their hopes in this one who was being called the Messiah.
 5. By a few days later, when it was becoming clear that if he was indeed the Messiah, he was a very different kind of Messiah than what they were hoping for, and they turned on him.
 6. As far as they were concerned, someone who couldn't even save himself wasn't going to be the one who was going to save them.
 7. So for us, with our hindsight, the question becomes one of figuring out who Jesus is for us.
 8. Of understanding that he came to save his people not through political or military power, but through the power of his ultimate sacrifice.
 9. And then being able to translate that kind of salvation into a life of praise through our own sacrifices for him and this kingdom that he brought about.
 10. Does that more complete understanding of the kind of king we are cheering for today mean that we ever stop shouting "Hosanna" or waving the palms? Absolutely not—that kind of joyful praise always has its place and is necessary.
 11. But we also are called to live out our praise in acts of sacrifice, in acts where we are standing up for Jesus and showing the world what kind of king he really is.

V. Conclusion

- A. So today this journey through the stations of Holy Week has only begun
 1. On Thursday night, we will visit both the Upper Room where Jesus served his disciples the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane, where after voicing his very human struggles, he prayed a prayer of acceptance of his Father's will.

2. On Friday, at the community Good Friday service, we will visit the traditional Stations of the Cross with an added contemporary and local flavor.
 3. And then a week from today, we will conclude this part of the journey at the empty tomb with those who came there and were still trying to figure out what it all meant.
- B. In the meantime, it's my hope that for each of us, this Holy Week journey will take on a new meaning not just in these Biblical places that we are visiting, but also in the places we find ourselves every day.
 - C. Because for each of us, every day we live is a part of our own Holy Week, where are called to praise and worship and make our own sacrifices for the king who rode into town on a donkey, showing us what kind of Messiah he was and still is.
 - D. Thanks be to God for this Holy Week journey and for God's presence with us as we experience it once again.