

March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' "

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

"Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

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In Luke's version of what is called "the triumphal entry," Jesus had been teaching up to just prior to instructing his disciples. As was his practice, he had been using parables to make his point. He had said-- you remember that the passage began with the words-- "*After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.*" What he had said just prior to that was, "*I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.*"

It was a sort of punch line for Luke's version of the parable of the talents. This parable was all about consequences. The main character in the story had power over the people in his region and had gone away to get more power from a local king. Before he left he had given money to a number of slaves with the understanding that they would increase his wealth while he was gone. Some of the slaves succeeded. That pleased the ruler. One did not and that displeased the ruler. In addition to all of that, the people who lived in this man's country did not want him to become a ruler over them and so they sent a delegation to appeal to the king not to make him a ruler over them. They failed and when he returned to the country, even more powerful than when he had left, there were some serious consequences to be borne.

The slaves who had earned more money for the ruler were given much more authority. The slave who had failed to earn more money had his money taken from him and given to the most successful slave. As for those who had objected to the king? They were put to death.

Now the curtain is raised on our story. According to Luke, after Jesus had told the story, he set out for Jerusalem where he would live out the consequences of his behavior. The parable (of the talents) that Jesus taught is the way of the world. Essentially one is required to cross at the corner, salute the flag, work hard, pay your taxes, and under no circumstances frighten the horses.

The way of the world is that the slave who had increased his master's money a thousand per cent was given the additional money from the man who had not earned any money. That's because, **"to all those who have, more will be given."** It should be no surprise to us. Most people expect to be rewarded for work that is beyond the employer's expressed expectations. The salesman who is tasked with selling 400 widgets a month and sells four thousand-- I don't know about you but it sounds to me like somebody has the inside track on that regional manager opening. Athletes have incentive clauses in their contracts. If Joe Blow makes the All Star team, or if the guy who hits 20 home runs a year hits thirty-- more money!

OK, enough about that. It is Luke's lead in to this story about Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. Distinct in Luke's Gospel is something that Bible students call the travel narrative. It begins at the end of the ninth chapter and ends in chapter 19 with his arrival in Jerusalem-- which is our text for this morning-- about his entry into the city. Just before he arrived Jesus told his parable about business as usual. Because he had exceeded expectations he would arrive and be treated as a hero, and there was nothing that the religious establishment, the institution, the temple could do about it. Jesus would proclaim that not even he could quiet the crowd. Pointing in their general direction he exclaimed, **"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."** Well of course they would. It was predictable. Jesus arrived and he was anything but the ruler he had been talking about in the parable before setting out on the last mile or two before entering Jerusalem-- and not unlike a king. But that ruler, not the sort of ruler they expected Jesus to be, was reality. In those days if you wanted to get rid of a ruler you either had to find a way to poison him, wait until he died, or overthrow him. Meanwhile that ruler was in a position to do just about anything he wanted as long as he didn't irritate his neighbors, or the Emperor.

People expected things to be that way. They weren't crazy about it, but they weren't really ready to put their lives and those of their families in jeopardy to change things. This was the way it had been as long as recorded memory served. What recorded memory also spoke of was that when a tyrant was overthrown, often it was at the hand of another who was as bad or worse.

Now comes Jesus who, according to Luke has been traveling for ten chapters and doing wonderful popular things: healing, casting out demons, challenging authority, teaching

about the future hope and the kingdom of God. What a wonderful king he would be! All those who had no power believed it. The cheering palm waving mob who welcomed him into the capital city could barely wait for Jesus to do his thing, to throw the bums out and form a new and different government, perhaps based on a principle that Jesus had mentioned while he was on the road. He had said to his disciples, **“You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”**

Things were about to change-- and for the better.

Now its time for a quantum leap, from that time to this.

What about you? Did you expect Jesus to make a remarkable change in the government of your life? As a Christian are you still waiting for that intimation of perfection that striving form the kingdom of God suggests as a by product of that effort?

Well the truth is that Jesus is not about overthrowing governments, and for sure he did not enter the city with the idea of tossing out the Romans, or the Jewish government. He would have been glad to but I believe they would have had to be willing. Jesus apparently feels the same way about individuals; about folks like you and me.

I do not believe Jesus is going to change any of us unless we want to be changed. So the big Palm Sunday question has to be, do you want to change? Oh, sorry, that's your big Palm Sunday question. My big Palm Sunday Question is do I want to change?

Well I don't know... What about you? Rather than embarrass any of you, let me embarrass myself. Do I want to change? I would hardly know where to begin; that's the truth! I'm not trying to be overly modest here; no phony humility. But if Don wants to change, he really can't keep using that as an excuse. I could start with my body sometimes referred to as "the temple of the Holy Spirit." My body! Some temple! At least it's big! You know, roomy! But it's too big. The Holy Spirit doesn't need so much room, and it is not good for me. Barring accidental injury or death, carrying this weight around takes days off my life, perhaps months, maybe even years. Time is a gift of God. By diminishing the time I have on this planet am I robbing God?

I need to lose ten pounds quickly! And then ten more, and after that ten more and so on and on until I have lost eighty pounds. Then I have to keep it off. But do I want to change?

I'm telling you this and I am not sure of the answer myself. I know what I'm supposed to say, but I've said that so many times that it's just another lie. I know that if I want to change that I have to stop talking about it, and simply do it-- no muss, no fuss, no fanfare. There is even a reward for my vanity: more room in the waistband, smaller size clothes, which means a greater selection.

I hope you're not disappointed just because I'm not going in to any other sins this morning-- but that is a good enough example. It is as wrong or as destructive as nearly anything I have ever done.

But enough about me! And back to you. Jesus calls us to come and die to our old self and become something very new. Is that a possibility for you? Is that something you can take seriously? Do you want to change?

When Jesus came to Jerusalem he had just finished telling a parable about the way things were and are. It was almost like an admission that without willingness to change, (and by the way, repent is a biblical code word that means change) not much is going to happen. And you know what? Not much has happened between the time of Jesus of Nazareth and the time of us.

If there is to be any change where do we begin? Only you can answer that, but if you haven't answered the question about wanting to change, don't waste your time.

*Do you want to change?*

I don't want anybody to leave here this morning with some idea that I think you are bad people. Not that it matters what I think, but it wouldn't not be true; you should know that by now. Besides, I'm long past pointing fingers at others. Still, it occurs to me that it is easy to get stuck; remember my own example that I gave you moments ago. It's easy to get stuck and I don't think that is something that any of us want to be.

The scary thing about the Spirit is that there is no giving up. Imagining the approach of Jesus and his risky teaching that is all about change, makes it hard to take those teachings seriously and nothing is ever going to change if we don't begin within ourselves. All I can leave you with this morning is that I hope I want to change. And I hope that you hope that in ways that only you can know-- you want to change.

Rev. Donald H. Smith