

O Jerusalem

Luke 13:31-35

Wayne Eberly

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

On Palm Sunday all systems were GO. If you were in the parade planning business, you would take great satisfaction in marking off all the components of a grand and glorious parade. If the parade was in honor of the king, you would want complete assurance that this truly was the king who was coming. If the king who was coming was the king of the Jews, you would know exactly what to look for. Have the heavy hitters offered their endorsement of the king?

Moses? Ah yes, Moses, that great prophet who stood toe to toe with Pharaoh, Moses whose raised staff was empowered by God to bring plagues upon Egypt, Moses whose raised staff parted the waters of the Red Sea, Moses who stood on Mount Sinai when those 10 Commandments were written into stone and handed over to him, Moses who walked out one morning and saw a landscape covered with bread delivered fresh from heaven, Moses who oversaw the construction of the Tabernacle and who anointed and ordained the first High Priest, Moses who led the people forty years in the wilderness, that very Moses endorsed Jesus. Right there on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses stood with Jesus. And then as the glory of Jesus shined brighter and brighter and brighter Moses faded from view. Moses was a great prophet, but Jesus was the Son of God.

How about Elijah? Elijah stood before those hundreds of prophets representing the false god Baal. Those false prophets of that false god couldn't get their little stack of wood to ignite no matter how much chanting and dancing and begging and pleading they gave to Baal. But then Elijah, with his stack of wood immersed in water, soaked and soggy, that stack of wood burst into flames, because Elijah was a man of God. Elijah rode straight into heaven on a chariot of fire. Elijah stood with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. And as the glory of Jesus shined brighter and brighter Elijah faded from view. Elijah was a great prophet, but Jesus was the Son of God.

Does the king who comes in the name of the Lord need the endorsement of the heavy hitters? None hits heavier than God Almighty. On that Mount of Transfiguration God said about Jesus, "This is my Son." At the waters of baptism God said to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; I am pleased with you."

If you are going to plan a parade for a king, you had better put on your checklist, "Is this the king?" And the heavy hitters all line up to say, "This is the King." Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

What if you a little obsessive about your parade planning? Sure, the heavy hitters all say Jesus is the King, but those are just words. So your checklist includes some action. Has Jesus proved he is the King? Are there any signs and wonders? John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus was the one everybody had been waiting for. When Jesus answered John he pretty much gave a checklist.

“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard:”

- The blind receive sight! CHECK!
- The lame walk! CHECK!
- Those who have leprosy are cleansed! CHECK!
- The deaf hear! CHECK!
- The dead are raised! CHECK!
- Good news is proclaimed to the poor! CHECK!

And that doesn't even include the forgiveness people found, the welcome they received, the hope that was restored, the demons that were cast out, the tears that were dried, and the love that filled countless lonely hearts. CHECK! CHECK! CHECK!

You could even run a DNA test on Jesus to find out, “Is this really the King?” Luke spells it out with a long genealogy for those who have the patience...Jesus was the son of Joseph (so people thought...remember he is the Son of God), but even with that Jesus was the son of Joseph, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi...on and on and on and on...through David, through Judah (one of the twelve sons of Jacob), through Jacob and Isaac and Abraham and back, back, back...all the way back to Adam. Does his DNA match the DNA of the King? CHECK!

There are probably other details a parade planner should check, but certainly any parade planner worth their salt would check the parade route. Is this the right place, the right location, the right city? Zechariah the prophet, years before Jesus, in a passage that is central to the parade on Palm Sunday, in the passage that tells of the king who comes, of the king who comes lowly and riding on a donkey, that prophet Zechariah tells us where the parade will take place. Zechariah gave us the exact location. “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!” Jerusalem. When the king comes he will come to Jerusalem. CHECK!

But boy, oh boy, if you were a parade planner worth your salt, and if you knew Jesus, and you checked off that box that said, “Jerusalem,” who could blame you if your heart started to beat a little faster, if your blood pressure rose, if you began to sweat a bit, if your brow became furrowed, if a sudden sense of anxiety started to swell up within you? Jerusalem? Isn't Jerusalem where Jesus set his face? Isn't Jerusalem where Jesus set his face after he had told the disciples, “The Son of Man

must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed on the third day raised to life”? Isn’t Jerusalem where Jesus had been warned that Herod was waiting? Isn’t Jerusalem where Jesus had been told Herod was not only waiting, Herod was wanting to kill him? Wasn’t it Jesus who said in the passage we read this morning, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” When you check Jerusalem on your parade planning list, a deep sense of foreboding fills the air.

Despite what Jesus had said about Jerusalem, about his suffering and death, when the parade is planned and all the boxes on the checklist are checked, Jesus climbs on that colt, that foal of a donkey, and he rides right into town. Cloaks are spread on the road. Branches are waved high in the air. There are shouts of acclamation. People are praising God in loud voices for all the miracles Jesus has done. The shouts of the people are joyful shouts. They cry out with glad hearts, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” They shout, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” Knowing what Jesus knows about Jerusalem, about his impending death, isn’t all this shouting and celebrating out of place, if not downright wrong? Shouldn’t Jesus tell everyone to quiet down, to become somber and sober? The Pharisees give him a chance to squelch the enthusiasm. But instead of calling for calm Jesus responds as if he is in full support of this joyful celebration. “I tell you, even if my disciples, even if this whole crowd tried to keep quiet, the stones of the earth would cry out!”

Knowing what Jesus knows about what will happen to him in Jerusalem, he nevertheless embraces the parade. He climbs up on that old donkey. He waves to the crowd that is waving at him. He shares in the rejoicing. He exults in the shouts of hosanna and the declarations that the king has come. If Jesus joined in the parade we certainly don’t have any reason to let this day be anything other than what it was on that first Palm Sunday. If Jesus embraced the celebration and the festivities and the shouts of joy, then today we not only have the right, we have the responsibility to be glad and joyous and sing loud songs of praise. “All glory, laud, and honor, to thee Redeemer King, to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.”

Ah, but our job isn’t done when Palm Sunday ends. The parade continues through the days of Holy Week. The parade takes us back and forth to the temple with Jesus as he is tested by the religious leaders with their many questions. The parade takes us to the table where Jesus breaks the Passover bread with his disciples. The parade includes that moment when disciples scatter, leaving Jesus all

alone. The parade winds through the dark alleys of that Friday where under dark skies we watch with great sadness and sorrow as Jesus suffers and dies. We mope around on Saturday, bemoaning the loss of our beloved Savior. And then the parade takes us to the tomb of Jesus. At the tomb we let our jaws drop in wonder and amazement when the angels say, "He is not here! He has risen from the dead!" No, the parade does not end on Palm Sunday. There is still so much of the parade that lies ahead when the sounds of Hosanna fade away.

As the dust of the parade settles, something very normal happens. One solitary figure emerges from the shadows and begins to perform a necessary task. That lone, solitary figure has a broom with them. Slowly pushing the broom, that one figure begins the work of cleaning up. That probably doesn't sound that unusual. When the parade is over you have to clean up. But what if that lone, solitary figure that was cleaning up happened to know something very important? What if that lone, solitary figure knew about Jerusalem, about the suffering and death of Jesus in Jerusalem? And what if that lone, solitary figure knew that not only was there suffering and death, there was also resurrection? And what if that lone, solitary figure, that lone, solitary figure who knew about the suffering and the death and the resurrection of Jesus, was cleaning up not because the parade was over? What if that lone, solitary figure was cleaning up because they knew there was another parade that was coming? What if that lone, solitary figure was getting things ready for the King who would come again?

Who is that lone, solitary figure busy at work getting things ready for the King who will come again? Maybe it is that one leper of the ten who were healed who came back to tell Jesus thank you. Maybe that leper saw the broom on the ground and picked it up, joyfully anticipating the day when Jesus would return. Or was it the woman who heard Jesus commend her deep love, a deep love that grew out of a deep experience of forgiveness. She was forgiven much and so she loved much. Maybe she grabbed the broom and with heartfelt expectancy began the preparations. Perhaps it was Zacchaeus, that converted tax collector. It could have been Peter. Peter fouled things up when he denied ever knowing Jesus. When Peter heard there was another parade he might have rushed to find out what he could do to get things ready. Maybe the sisters Martha and Mary took turns with the broom, both having opportunity to serve, and both having opportunity to sit quietly in reverence and meditation. What if that Prodigal Son whose story was such a shining example of redemption and reconciliation raced to get the route ready for others to experience that same new life?

I keep saying it was a lone, solitary figure. But that probably isn't true. More likely it is each of the ones I have named. And it is undoubtedly more. Everyone who has experienced the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ longs for him to return. Everyone who has experienced the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ

has heard him call for us to get busy preparing for when he does come again. Get the parade route ready by stopping to help wounded travelers, people in need, those who are suffering and in pain, just like the Good Samaritan. Start making an invitation list for the parade, inviting the poor, the hungry, the hurting, the lost, the least, and the last. Get busy looking for lost sheep and lost coin and lost son and daughter and haul them along so that they line the parade, shouting with joy at a God who loves tax collectors and sinners. Make room in the front for the children, those little ones so precious to Jesus, welcome them, nurture them, love them, and bring them right into the arms of Jesus.

When we realize Palm Sunday was not the end of the parade...when we realize we are not cleaning up from a parade that is over, but instead we are cleaning up for a parade that is coming soon, preparing a parade for Jesus who will come and claim his crown as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, when we realize that we have been called to get things ready for Jesus, then we all join in the joyful work of preparing the way for the Lord. We flip pancakes and we hammer nails, we sing anthems and we proclaim good news, we listen, we open our hearts, we pray, we visit those who are alone or sick, we do justice, we love mercy, and we walk humbly with our God, we fill boxes with nickels and dimes believing those coin filled boxes will help a family find a home, we spread mulch, plant flowers, make quilts, hide Easter eggs, we love God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength, and we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We do all these things and more because Jesus is coming.

Someday, and we believe it will be someday soon, the parade will roll into town. The trumpet will sound. The clouds will roll back. Heaven will open. And Jesus will come. He will come in all his glory and honor. If we shouted Hosanna when he came to Jerusalem that first time so many years ago, what will we shout when he comes this time to rule the earth? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. Heaven and earth are full of his glory." We will sing with the angels, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Oh yes, we will sing when that parade rolls into town. "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise."

One of my favorite songs is about a train. "People get ready, there's a train a coming, you don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord." Today I want to change that song just a bit. Today I want to say, "People get ready, there's a parade a coming, you don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord." And as we look forward to that glorious and grand parade when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom on earth in all its majesty and splendor, know that the invitation is for all to find their place in this parade, in his parade.

This parade is for saints and sinners...this parade is for losers and winners.

This parade is for the sad and brokenhearted...this parade is for loved ones and sweet souls departed.

This parade is for sins that are forgiven...this parade is for finding new ways of living.

This parade is about a past that does not bind us...this parade is about a God who will always find us.

This parade calls us to love one another...this parade is filled with sisters and brothers.

This parade little children find a home...this parade no one is ever alone.

This parade has a God who is able...this parade brings us right to this table.

This parade there is wine and bread...this parade Jesus is risen from the dead.

This parade is filled with celebration...this parade is about God's new creation.

This parade is about the God who frees us...this parade, this parade, is all about Jesus.

This parade...Hosanna in the highest.

This parade...Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

This parade...Palm branches we wave.

This parade...The stone is gone and there is an empty grave.

This parade...This parade...This parade...This parade...

People get ready, this parade is coming...you don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord.