

## TICKER TAPE PARADE - JERUSALEM STYLE

Luke 19:28-40

Have you ever felt like you have lived an entire lifetime, or at least several months in one short week?? I would imagine that quite a few of us here this morning know exactly what I mean. In some ways it seems a life time ago that over 400 people tried valiantly to fit into this sanctuary to celebrate the life of Ron Hatcher, yet it was just 7 short days ago. Monday afternoon we laid Ron to rest in Oaklawn Cemetery.

Monday night thousands of March Madness fans were glued to their televisions, particularly in our Commonwealth to see if the Virginia Cavaliers could clinch an NCAA championship for the first time in 35 years. Tuesday the flu bug hit the Walker home. Wednesday afternoon Nellie Demastus was laid to rest, and for the remainder of the week your pastor has been in her annual race against time with the April 15 tax deadline. Did I mention that the flu bug hit the Walker home? Yes, it has been a grand week!

Monday night, I had gone to bed early, after watching only a few minutes into the first half of the UVA/Texas Tech ball game. As is not unusual for me, I was wide awake at 11:15 so wandered downstairs to see if the game was over. I tuned in just as UVA scored to put the game in over time. The next 5 minutes of playing time was exhilarating as UVA managed to pull away from Texas Tech clinching the win by 8 points. Orange and blue confetti streamed down from the lofty ceilings of U.S. Bank Stadium and Tony Bennett's team surrounded him, brand-new national championship caps already on. The UVA fans in the crowd, euphoric, roared at his every word. I was reminded of every Wall Street ticker tape parade I had witnessed in my lifetime.

Now, take that mental image – the image of the champions joyously racing out to center court when the final buzzer sounds – and place it in Jerusalem. This morning we are celebrating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he had his own ticker tape of sorts. The year is not 2019, but more like A.D. 33 – give or take five or six years. Buzz is building as thousands of Jews gather for their celebration of Passover in the holy city. A march is staged by Jesus and his disciples, and before you know it – madness!

Just as fans make their bracket picks and try to guess who will make it to the Final Four, residents of Jerusalem were trying to figure out who would come out on top. Some of the locals were betting on a new ruler who would establish the kingdom of their ancestor David (v. 10). Others in Jerusalem wanted a religious leader such as the high priest to come out on top. The Romans' imperial political machinery wanted their appointee Pilate to keep the peace through a show of military force. And the disciples wanted Jesus to be their champion – but they were not exactly sure what his victory would look like (Homiletics 2018).

We begin this morning's familiar text from Luke with Jesus continuing his journey towards Jerusalem and the fate that awaits him there. It is not that unusual for him and his disciples to be heading in that direction since every devout Jew was headed there to celebrate the Passover. What stands out from any another traveler is the manner in which Jesus enters into the city. Hear again the words from the Message: "After saying these things, Jesus headed straight up to Jerusalem. When he got near Bethphage and Bethany at the mountain called Olives, he sent off two of the

disciples with instructions: “Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you’ll find a colt tethered, one that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says anything, asks, ‘What are you doing?’ say, ‘His Master needs him.’”

And this is exactly what happens. “They brought the colt to Jesus. Then, throwing their coats on its back, they helped Jesus get on. As he rode, the people gave him a grand welcome, throwing their coats on the street.” In Old Testament times, people spread their cloaks on the road for a king to walk on (2 Kings 9:13). The shouts of the crowd were clearly intended to identify Jesus as their king, the son of David. Jesus did not shy away from this role with some kind of false humility, but he embraced it. He entered Jerusalem as a leader, a king.

But what kind of king was Jesus? Clearly most if not all of his faithful followers hoped, prayed and believed him to be the kind of king who would overthrow the Roman government and establish the nation of Israel. If this were the case, Jesus certainly surrounded himself with a strange collection of disciples.

Pastor Ron Edmondson says that Jesus is a leader who invests in people that others would have dismissed – a fisherman named Peter, a tax collector named Matthew, a woman named Mary who had seven demons cast out of her. People like us. He practices servant leadership, most visibly when he washes the feet of his followers on the night of the Last Supper. And Jesus shares responsibility with others in a succession plan, telling his followers that they will have to carry on his work after he is no longer with them. Jesus is a leader who invests in people, serves them and entrusts them with his work. He is a true champion because he looks beyond his own achievements to the continuation of his ministry and mission. (Homiletics, 2018)

Jesus was definitely not your run of the mill leader. Think about it: A Roman leader would have ridden in a chariot pulled by magnificent white stallions... Jesus entered the city on a donkey, and a borrowed one!

A political leader would have been surrounded by security guards who would have kept crowds from close physical contact to prevent any personal harm to him... Jesus was surrounded by his disciples representing many walks of life and rode into the midst of the people, almost rubbing shoulders with them.

A military leader would have galloped along the road, passing the crowds with perhaps a wave of the hand or a nod of the head if there were any recognition at all... Jesus on a donkey moved slowly with the people, accompanying the people, as well as accompanied by the people.

A religious leader in traditional, appropriate priestly robes would have moved sedately through the crowds surrounded by an orderly contingency of other religious leaders who would've prevented anyone who was unclean from touching him... Jesus, dressed in his usual attire, moved humbly through the crowds, surrounded by his diverse band of disciples, not shrinking from the touch of anyone. (Homiletics, 1992).

So what was Jesus doing on that day? Why would he make a gesture so dramatic that the crowds went wild and praised God? The Pharisees, seeing this, *asked Jesus to stop them* — and by implication, to reject their accolades. What was Jesus thinking? For years, the church has called this event “The Triumphal Entry,” but that doesn’t fit the biblical description very well. Jesus’

entry into Jerusalem set in motion a series of events which did little to endear him to the ruling party both of the synagogue and with the Roman Government.

The very next day after this amazing entry into the city, Jesus displays another dramatic public act: the “cleansing” of the temple, where he literally whipped up a frenzy! We don’t know Jesus’ motivation, but it does seem that he was forcing the authorities to deal with him. Go big or go home. Jesus went big. He was lighting a fuse that exploded later in the week with the bang of the soldiers’ hammers as they drove nails into his hands and feet.

Both the entry into the city and the brouhaha in the temple defied the status quo of the city: “No, you can’t carry on as usual!” he seems to be shouting. “My kingdom is not of this world! His behavior sort of doesn’t make sense. Usually, Jesus did not want to be the center of attention. Often, like after he’d healed someone, he’d caution the excited person, “Now, don’t tell anyone about this.” But maybe that’s the point. Jesus took dramatic, out-of-character steps to make something happen. It was almost as if he was forcing the hand of both Pilate and Herod. If there is one thing I have grown to understand about the human condition, is we mere mortals have a very low level of tolerance for being ridiculed. And Jesus’ very actions were something of waving the red flag in front of both these rulers and the leaders of the temple who were so threatened with Jesus’ growing influence.

The following illustration reminds me of this truth: A community-wide Easter pageant assigned various people in the town to play the different parts. The character of Jesus went to a most unlikely person - a big, burly, barroom brawler, an oilfield worker, the most unlikely person to be typecast as our Lord. After several weeks of rehearsals, the day of the Easter Pageant finally arrived.

When they came to the part of the play where Jesus was being led away to be crucified, one little man, filling in as a part of the crowd, got caught up in the emotion of the drama. He joined in the shouts of "Crucify him! Crucify him!" as Jesus was led away toward Calvary. Then, in the midst of shouting insults at the top of his lungs, he accidentally sprayed some spit in the face of the character playing Jesus as the actor walked by carrying the cross on his back. The oilfield worker stopped in his tracks, reached up and wiped his face dry. And then he looked at the little man and said: "I'll be back to take care of you after the resurrection."

Jesus actions seemed to force the issue to whom the faithful and religious leaders showed their allegiance. We live in an age when a lot of issues need to be forced into the forefront of life. We may not like it, but the issues have been forced, and we are compelled to address them or ignore them.

The #MeToo movement, for example, has exposed the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace and other environments. (The church has its own version of #MeToo called #SilenceIsNotSpiritual.)

We are forced to address the issues raised by whistleblowers — employees or insiders — who become aware of wrongdoing or dangerous practices within a corporation or agency or even a church, and then make the information public so it can be stopped.

We can't ignore protestors who put themselves in legal jeopardy or risk physical violence to say that something isn't right, fair, for the common good or pleasing God.

These are some examples. When Jesus rides into our lives, whether in a church on a Sunday or on the street he also forces an issue for us. He calls us to make a decision, to follow him, to trust him and maybe even to confront injustice, expose danger or challenge arrogance that rides over others.

This Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. You may be wondering why I have chosen to only focus on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and not get into the Passion story at all. The church has come to call this Sunday, Palm/Passion Sunday. Do you know why? The rationale behind this is that congregations had stopped attending the services of Holy Week, and to miss the story of the passion was like jumping from the celebration of Palm Sunday into the Celebration and Victory of the Resurrection. For me, this ranks right up there with drive by communion, and drive by funeral visitation. It is disrespectful to the sacrifice of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I am quite stubborn and deliberate in choosing to do this. Part of this stems from my staunch Roman Catholic upbringing, but it also is a matter of devotion to my Lord and Savior. Yes, Holy Week can be like the Final Four of Basketball, but I strongly feel Jesus deserves far more than lip service on Palm Sunday to the horrendous story of his Passion and Death on the cross. I have a responsibility to present to each of you the Good News of Jesus Christ and I simply cannot do so skimming over Holy Week. If you are not able to attend our Holy Thursday and Good Friday services, and there will be some who cannot, I pray you find the time in your personal devotions of the week to walk the road to Golgotha.

In some ways, Garrison Keillor perfectly sums up my own jaded view of Christmas/Easter Christians – you know the people who are absent the other 50 Sundays of the year but will show up on Christmas and Easter. “I came to church as a pagan this year, though wearing a Christian suit and white shirt, and sat in a rear pew with my sandy-haired gap-toothed daughter whom I would like to see grow up in the love of the Lord, and there I was, a skeptic in the henhouse, thinking weaselish thoughts. This often happens around Easter. God, in [a] humorous way, sometimes schedules high holy days for a time when your faith is at low tide, a mud flat strewn with newspapers and children's beach toys, and, while everyone else is all joyful and shiny among the lilies and praising up a storm, there you are, snarfling and grumbling. Which happened to me this year. God knows all about it so I may as well tell you.

Holy Week is a good time to face up to the question: Do we really believe in that story or do we just like to hang out with nice people and listen to organ music? There are advantages, after all, to being in the neighborhood of people who love their neighbors. If your car won't start on a cold morning, you've got friends. ...There is comfort for the doubter in the Passion story. You are not alone. Jesus' cry from the cross was a cry of incredulity. The apostle denied even knowing Jesus three times. The guy spent years with Jesus, saw the miracles up close, the raising of Lazarus, the demons cast out, the sick healed, the water-walking trick, all of the special effects, but when the cards were down, he said, "Who? Me? No way."

May this Holy Week of 2019 be unlike any other Holy Week in your journey of faith! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.