

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REV. JIM CAPPS- MARCH 24, 2013

"THE SUFFERING SERVANT- CHEERS AND TEARS"

LUKE 19:28-44

About a month ago, on my day off, Alice and I were cleaning out closets, trying to get rid of anything we don't absolutely need. There it was in a box with some old yearbooks--my high scrap book. I must admit I spent nearly an hour going down memory lane.

There were all kinds of press clippings like the week before our first football game where the heading was "Lawrence Fullback Has The Mumps." Now, that wasn't a particularly fond memory, except that I played the full game that week. Or, there was a picture from the half-time ceremony from the homecoming game when our halfback was to give the homecoming queen flowers and I was to give her a kiss. But unbeknownst to me, I had blood all over my face and she turned her head in horror just as we reached what was for me a much anticipated moment.

Most of the clippings though bore the March dates of my junior year when my basketball team lost in the state semifinals in East Lansing. Along with the clippings and the pictures, were pieces of basketball nets which we had cut down after our district, regional and quarter final victories.

Since no team from our little town of 700 had ever won anything, the people really got behind us. They knew we couldn't possibly win at the next level, so they pulled out the stops and had a parade for us after winning each title. Even though it was weather like we have had this week, we rode on fire trucks through the streets, with people cheering and sirens blaring. It was idyllic!

Then in that semifinal game against Flint St. Matthew the bubble burst and even though we had a frenetic comeback, we fell 7 points short. There were tears because our dream wasn't realized. Amid those tears, there was another parade when we returned home late the night after our defeat. When we saw the car lights stretching back as far as the eye could see, we cried, both because we had disappointed our loyal fans, but also, with a deep sense of pride because we had gone where no other team from our town had ever gone.

Sometimes there isn't much that separates cheers and tears. There certainly wasn't in Lawrence, Michigan on this weekend in March, 51 years ago. In the passage which I am going to read, there was another parade which included cheers and tears. As we complete this sermon series on the "Suffering Servant," please follow along with me as I read from Luke 19:28-44.

ON THAT FIRST PALM SUNDAY THERE WERE CHEERS OF PASSION AS JESUS PREPARED TO ENTER JERUSALEM.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, time and time again He told people to keep His identity and miracles under wraps because His "time had not yet come." He wasn't trying to be a "dog and pony show." He didn't want a media blitz. The "kingdom button" would be pushed too soon and the religious authorities would do Him in before He had a chance to do the necessary "on-the-job" training for His disciples.

But now, the time had arrived and Jesus would let it be known at a time and place where thousands of people would be streaming into Jerusalem. It was a *kairos* moment. It was a moment of fulfillment. It was kingdom standard time. For those who believed Jesus was the long-awaited the Messiah, this Passover holiday could be the occasion on which He would launch His overthrow of the Romans. While that may seem farfetched, in nearby Bethany Jesus had raised Lazarus who had been dead for four days. Nothing was impossible with God. Now was the time!

Jesus and His entourage, made up of His disciple and others who were curiously watching His every move, had just traveled the rugged 20 miles from Jericho to just outside of Jerusalem. Since there was a price on His head, this was a bold and courageous move on His part. Those close to Him were hoping He would attend the festivities and set up His Kingdom. Yet, realistically they knew He could meet His demise.

Always in touch with accomplishing God's purpose, Jesus was concerned with fulfilling the prophetic prediction in Zechariah 9:9, when he said, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus had somehow pre-arranged the securing of the colt of a donkey from owners whom Jesus must have known.

Unless you are from Missouri where donkeys are held in high regard, we find it amazing that Jesus would select the colt of a donkey to be his transportation in this parade. In the 500 Festival Parade, the honored people ride in shiny pace car convertibles. In the Rose Parade, it's usually vintage antique convertibles that carry the VIP's.

The customs of Jesus' day were different. While after a great military victory, a king my might ride a magnificent horse in a parade, it was a common practice for a king coming in peace to ride on a donkey. By the way, a donkey was considered a noble beast in those days and not looked down upon as we do today.

The disciples placed a cloak upon the colt and then put Jesus on it. Then they gave him our equivalent of "red carpet" treatment as they spread their cloaks along the road way for Him to traverse. As they came to a fork in the road where there must have been the greatest number of spectators, they shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" In the other gospels, they were also shouting "Hosanna!" or "Save us now!" as they waved palm branches.

Can you imagine some of the people in the crowd that day? If we look closely, we might see Bartimaeus, who has a smile on his face that you could never wipe off. This is the first parade he has ever seen. He was the blind man whom Jesus healed on the Jericho Road.

And there with his sisters, Mary and Martha, is Lazarus. After being dead for 4 days, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. He is treated with awe as people approach him.

Not far from Lazarus is Zacchaeus, the little tax-collector whom Jesus called down from a tree. He is now the philanthropist, giving a large portion of his wealth to the poor and needy. The look of serenity and joy etched on what was once a very harsh face is a wonderful sight.

Several rows back in the crowd nestled among a few of the religious leaders is Nicodemus, almost incognito. He has celebrity status and doesn't want to be recognized. Instead of scowling at Jesus like his paranoid colleagues, it's almost as if Nicodemus wants to join with the crowd in cheering the One coming as the King of peace.

Among the common people who are cheering are those who are there out of sheer curiosity. They know that this could be a history-making event and did not want to miss it. Sprinkled among the crowd are those who believe with their whole hearts that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. The moment has arrived for Him to overthrow the Romans and set up the Kingdom He has heralded for the 3 years of His ministry.

But there is one more very noticeable group. There are no cheers coming from their mouths. No, at one point they stop the parade and call Jesus out with, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" In their minds, this troubling spectacle was pure blasphemy. It felt to them like the whole world was going after Jesus. They had to stop Him no matter the cost.

Jesus' response to these misguided religious leaders was, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." At this point He must have pointed to the gravel path on which they walked. In other words, the time has arrived. Nothing will stop what is about to happen.

Do you hear the cheers reverberating through the halls of time? Of all the parades of human history, this very well may have been the most significant, serving as an introduction or prologue to the greatest, most momentous event our world would ever experience.

But wait a moment! In the midst of the cheers, if we look closely, we also see a vivid contrast.

ON THAT FIRST PALM SUNDAY, THERE WERE TEARS OF COMPASSION AS JESUS REALIZED HE WOULD BE REJECTED.

As the jubilant parade moved slowly down the hill called the Mount of Olives, with Jerusalem and the Temple in full sight, there were tears of compassion streaming down Jesus' face. While some might have thought them to be tears of joy and relief, in the midst of celebration, if one looked closely into Jesus' expressive eyes, they were clearly tears of sadness and grief.

While in the din of the spirited crowd drown out His words so that only a few heard them, it was at this point that Jesus spoke to Jerusalem, bustling with Passover pilgrims:

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

The supreme irony of it all was that some of these same people who were cheering amid Jesus' tears, would be crying "Crucify him! Crucify him!" the Friday before the Passover Sabbath. The fickle tide of public opinion would turn against Jesus bringing about another grizzly parade which wind its way through Jerusalem's narrow streets and out to the hill of Golgatha, the place of execution.

This same people whom Jesus had come to save as God's chosen people, would utterly reject Him to the point of crucifying Him. How deep His anguish must have been as He looked at the Holy City with tears streaming down His cheeks.

Sadly, Jesus' tears in the midst of that parade were portends of things to come. For you see, just 40 years later, in 70 A. D., the Romans laid Jerusalem siege, completely surrounding it, a common military strategy in that day. The results were horrific as men, women and children starved to death. There was little resistance when the ruthless Romans came in and completely destroyed the city. That's what Jesus foresaw when He shed tears for Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.

APPLICATION

On this cold, blustery Sunday when the snow is flying, it's Palm Sunday once again. Through the years, on this Sunday before Easter, I always picture Jesus riding on a colt of a donkey into our midst down our center aisle. He looks anything but regal. In fact, to our way of thinking, He almost looks humorous, with His feet dragging on our carpet.

One Sunday several years ago, at Southport Presbyterian, we actually got a little donkey, so that at this point in the worship service, a person depicting Jesus would ride in and make the story even more real. While our fears of needing a pooper scooper were not realized, the stubborn little beast did not cooperate. As long as the rider was mounted on him, he would not move, but remained stationary.

With all of that said, imagine with me today that Jesus, the Suffering Servant, rides down our center aisle this morning. In what has become tradition for this Sunday, we throw our coats down before Him, giving Him the "Red Carpet" treatment.

We shout, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." As we cheer the One who came as Savior and Lord, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in a way that only He can do, His eyes meet each of our ours. What is His response to you and me? Are there cheers or tears? Does He see you crown Him? Or, crucify Him?

Maybe we are a lot like the people in the crowd that first Palm Sunday. Maybe He has healed you like blind Bartimaeus and you are cheering gratitude for a new lease on life. Maybe you are like Lazarus, and you are cheering because this Jesus has completely transformed your life. It feels like He has brought you back from the dead and given you a glorious new beginning.

Possibly, you see yourself in Zacchaeus and you are cheering because Jesus has completely changed your priorities. There is no question that this change is for the better.

If you see yourself in these people, I believe Jesus' eyes are filled with affirmation and gratitude for the difference God has brought about in you.

Or, could it be that like Nicodemus, you are studying Jesus closely and are weighing your options? You are still undecided as to whether you will receive Him as the Lord of your life. You may be concerned about the changes He would make.

In a general sense, you may be among the curious who are here today, seriously looking for something more in life. Could this Jesus really bring the very positive changes others have claimed?

Can He really bring forgiveness from your past, no matter how good or bad you have been? Is it possible that He could bring peace to your anxiety? Joy and meaning to your rather stale and bland existence? Can Jesus help you with the fear and dis-ease you feel about the future, making you genuinely hopeful?

If you are like Nicodemus or the curious, Jesus meets you with “Yes” eyes, inviting you to come to Him and crown Him as the king of your life. By that we mean receiving God’s gift of Jesus simply praying for forgiveness and asking Jesus to become the Master of your life.

Or, like Luke’s account of that first Palm Sunday, as Jesus looks at you, there are tears of compassion. He gave His life for you on a cruel cross, but for all kinds of reasons, you have rejected Him. Might he say to you, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace...”

If He looks at you through eyes of tears today, that can change, as it undoubtedly did for some in Jerusalem before it fell in 70 A. D. By humbly coming to Jesus and making Him your Savior and Lord, you can turn His tears to cheers.

As we think about what this Jesus came to do in each of our lives, let me close with this story from pastor and author, Max Lucado, from his book, *When God Whispers Your Name*:

“My wife loves antiques. I don’t. (I find them a bit old.) But because I love my wife, I occasionally find myself guiding three children through an antique store while Denalyn shops. Such is the price of love.

The secret to survival in a shop of relics is to find a chair and an old book and settle down for the long haul. That’s what I did yesterday. After cautioning the kids to look with their eyes and not their hands, I sat down in an overstuffed rocker with some *Life* magazines from the fifties.

That’s when I heard the music, Piano music. Beautiful music. Vintage Rogers and Hammerstein. The hills were alive with the sound of someone’s skill at the keyboard.

I turned to see who was playing, but couldn’t see anyone. I stood and walked closer. A small group of listeners had gathered at the old upright piano. Between the furniture I could see the small back of the pianist. Why it’s only a child! With a few more steps I could see her hair. Short, blonde, and cute like... My heart, it’s Andrea!

Our seven-year-old was at the piano, her hands racing up and down the keyboard. I was stunned. What gift of heaven is this that she can play in such a way? Must be a time-released gene she got from my side of the family. But as I drew closer, I saw the real reason. Andrea was ‘playing’ a player piano. She wasn’t making the music; she was following it. She wasn’t commanding the keyboard; she was trying to keep up with it. Though it appeared she was playing the song, in reality, she was only trying to keep up with one already written. When a key would dip, her hands would dash.

Oh, but if you could have seen her little face, delighted with laughter! Eyes were dancing as would her feet had she been able to stand and play at the same time.

I could see why she was so happy. She had sat down to play 'Chopsticks' but instead played the 'Sound of Music.' What's more she couldn't fail. One greater than she was dictating the sound. Andrea was free to play as much as she wanted, knowing the music would never suffer."

Dear friends, this Jesus who rides down our center aisle today wants to play His tune in your life and mine. As the ever-moving parade of life moves on for each of us, as Jesus plays His Kingdom tune through us, He wants to change tears into cheers in the lives of those around us.