

## **“The Things That Make for Peace”**

**Luke 19:28-44**

4-1-07 – Palm Sunday

Fairlington Presbyterian Church

Sermon by Jan Edmiston

This year, there is a relative rarity in the calendar: both Western and Orthodox Palm Sunday fall on the same date. (Maybe you didn't even realize that the dates are usually different.) But this year, the rarity that more people probably noticed was this: Palm Sunday falls on the same weekend as the NCAA basketball Final Four.

We don't have pompoms to wave this morning (and I'm guessing that most of you aren't in a pompom-shaking mood), but we do have palms. If you are a Georgetown fan, wave your palms. If you are an Ohio State fan wave your palms. How about Florida? UCLA? And if you really don't care, wave 'em high.

Paul Borden, a Methodist church leader and writer, says that there are two metaphors we need to stop using as we talk about the church<sup>1</sup>. I'm only covering one today. Borden says we need to stop using the metaphor of “family” when talking about the church and we need to start using a “team” metaphor instead.

I believe he's right. Too many churches fall into unhealthy patterns when they try to run a church like a family. Sometimes people are asked to serve as leaders – not because they are called to serve – but because it would make them feel better if they are asked. Maybe we want to reward them for faithful attendance on Sunday morning, or we want to make them feel appreciated for getting us a deal on a new copy machine.

I met a pastor a couple months ago who told me that the church's heating bills are exorbitantly high, but they can't change fuel sources because they buy fuel from a company owned by one of the charter members of the church. They don't want to offend him because “he's a member of the church family.” Friends, this is extremely dysfunctional – as many (most?) families are.

But imagine running the church like a team. In a real way, I hope that the Georgetown Hoyas basketball team are like a family in that they care for each other. Maybe they even love each other. But when Coach Thompson was picking the starting line up for last night's game, notice that he didn't start Kenny Izzo – a senior Forward who might have been the sentimental choice because it would be so great to get to play in the NCAA Semi-Finals your senior year. By all accounts, Kenny Izzo is a great guy. But he has a 0% scoring record. So Thompson started DaJuan Summers – a gifted freshman.

Their mission was to win the game.

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<sup>1</sup> **Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation At the Mission Field**  
by Paul D. Borden.

If our mission is to win the world for Jesus Christ – to make God’s kingdom come, God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven – then we want to send out the best possible people to do the job. We want the most gifted officers, the most talented staff we can possibly find because we want Christ’s mission accomplished. We want God to win. We want love and healing and goodness and resurrection to win. And this is why the church should think of itself as a team. We want to recruit and train the best possible team to serve a greater mission.

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You may wonder what any of this has to do with Palm Sunday and Holy Week. But this week – historically – had a surprise ending. It looked like the other side was going to win. It looked like the game was over. But God planned a shocking ending. And, in this case, it wasn’t a game after all. It was real life.

Today, the story is Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. Some call it his “victorious entry” as if he’s already won. But reading Luke’s version of this story, it’s clear that Jesus’ battle is not yet finished.

It starts out festive and grand: we are told that a “whole multitude of the disciples” loudly praised God for all the amazing things they had seen. This wasn’t merely a gathering of 12 disciples here. The Greek word here literally means “a great number,” “a great company.”<sup>2</sup> They are shouting joyous things:

***Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the LORD!  
Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven!***

By the end of the week, the multitude would be shouting something far different though, something angry and hate-filled.<sup>3</sup>

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Notice that in Luke’s version of the story, there’s no mention of palms. They spread their cloaks on the road for the donkey to ride over – a symbol of royal treatment – but there is no cutting down of tree branches like in Matthew<sup>4</sup> or Mark<sup>5</sup> or John.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word for “multitude” here is plethos {play'-thos} where we get the word “plethora.”

<sup>3</sup> See Luke 23:18, 21 where they shouted “*Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us! Crucify him!*”

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 21:8 “*A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*”

<sup>5</sup> Mark 11:8 “*Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.*”

<sup>6</sup> John 12:13 “*So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him . . .*” (This is the only mention in scripture that the branches were palm branches.)

This is less of a parade atmosphere here than in the other gospels, where we are told that the crowds actually joined the march. Some walked in front of Jesus on the donkey, and some walked behind him.

But in Luke's version, in this parade – if you could call it a parade at all – the situation quickly turns into a bit of an uprising:

- There are Pharisees demanding that Jesus keep the disciples quiet.
- There's Jesus becoming emotional at the sight of Jerusalem:

***If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!  
But now they are hidden from your eyes.***

I get the sense that he is crying tears of frustration and anger.

- Because then Jesus enters the temple and began turning over the tables – the famous “You’ve-turned-my-house-of-prayer-into-a-den-of-robbers” scene.

After a couple of days of provocative teaching in the temple, it's no wonder that the temple leaders were “looking for a way to kill him.” We are told, though, that “the people were spellbound by what they heard.”

### **They were Big Fans.**

Jesus was telling them about a different way of life, a way of life that freed them from the oppression of the Roman government, a way of serving God that had less to do with keeping a checklist of rules and more to do with loving each other and healing the sick, more to do with transforming the world to look a little more like Eden and less like a beggar's street corner. Jesus invited them to join him in finding a new way to see.<sup>7</sup> Abundant Life.<sup>8</sup> Peace – but a different kind of peace than most of the world knew about.<sup>9</sup>

Who would not want this?

But Jesus wept as he entered Jerusalem, because they did not recognize – yet – the things that make for peace.

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The world is filled with people who admire Jesus. We have Turkish Muslim friends who occasionally worship here with us – or I should say they sit in the pews with us. They are not worshipping Jesus. They admire Jesus. They believe he was a good

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<sup>7</sup> John 9:40

<sup>8</sup> John 10:10

<sup>9</sup> John 14:27

man, a peace-maker. But they do not follow him and are not here looking for a new religion. They simply appreciate him.

And here's the problem. Many of us – perhaps most of us – are the same. We are big fans. We wave our palms – but we wave them from the sidelines. We hesitate to join the parade and follow Jesus in Jerusalem.

And why do we hesitate? If we say we believe that Jesus is God's only Son – our LORD, then why don't we freely and joyfully follow Jesus all the way to the cross?

Because it's dangerous. We are fine with wearing signs of our loyalty like a fan wears the team sweatshirt or cap. We wear crosses around our necks. Just as we proudly watch the games of our favorite teams, we come to worship and watch.

But following Jesus is not about watching someone else play, someone else work. It's not about writing a check so that someone else will do the work. It's not about having your name on the rolls of membership, like the names on roll of boosters.

Following Jesus is about getting into the parade. It's about moving toward the place where God is leading us, even if that place is dangerous.

**And here's the thing: we will not know peace until we participate. We will not know peace until we get up and follow.**

Peace doesn't come by watching on the sidelines. Peace comes by recognizing that this is for us, this way of living. This is not just something Jesus did, and then after we watch him, we go home and do whatever we wish.

We are called – not to be fans, but to be followers – to do what Jesus did. The things that make for peace include:

- Healing the sick.
- Befriending the friendless.
- Loving one's enemies.
- Turning the other cheek.

Those last two are especially hard: loving one's enemies and turning the other cheek. We are okay watching Jesus do that, but we are not really interested in it for ourselves. Too hard.

We admire Jesus for being able to do this. But we can't do it.

Of course there are opportunities to do it: isn't there someone in your life who makes you a little crazy? Maybe he has a power over you. Maybe she is frustrating. He makes you angry or hurt. I don't believe God wants us to be abused. But I do believe God wants us to deal with these people in a different way. How would Jesus deal with them?

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We are in an interesting place in our church history, and I don't just mean the celebration of Fairlington Presbyterian Church's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I mean The Church of Jesus Christ – the holy catholic – universal – church.

In the First Century, when Jesus marched into Jerusalem, the crowds disappeared fairly quickly because it was clearly dangerous to be seen with Jesus. Even his closest friends would betray him, would deny knowing him.

But something happened a week later, and then five weeks later. Something happened that would make weak friends give their lives for this man. Something happened that turned them from fans to real followers.

Throughout more recent history, it's been safe to be a Christian – at least in this country – and in many places it's been culturally expected -- at least in the 19th and 20th century in this great nation that you would be a Christian. But because of this, we've lost the sense that being a Christian involves more than standing on the sidelines. Being a Christian means following Jesus, not merely admiring him from afar. And ironically, because being Christian has become so culturally expected, we have forgotten how dangerous it's supposed to be.

Being a Christian is supposed to be counter-cultural. Following Jesus is supposed to involve some sacrifice. Jesus tells us that this is what brings peace, and I have a feeling he's talking about that peace that passes all understanding. Because being a Christ-following, counter-cultural, sacrificing person is not going to bring peace in the secular, cultural sense.

I get cultural peace by buying a new car and wearing certain clothing. I get spiritual peace by following Jesus who clothes were taken and sold to people who killed him. It's obvious which peace is easier to pursue.

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And so, as we enter this holiest of weeks on the Christian calendar, we have some choices. We can watch from afar and see what Jesus was willing to do. Or we can join the parade and take some risks ourselves, trusting that in the end – the very end – this choice – the choice to follow our Savior - will bring peace, will bring a slice of life that is exactly what God had hoped it would be.