

“Palm Sunday Questions”

Luke 19:28-44

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Palm Sunday and questions naturally go together. After all, it is unusual for us to begin a worship service by having members enter the sanctuary waving palm leaves. Even Christians ask about the origin and significance of this tradition, so you can imagine the questions that are raised by those that are not followers of Jesus.

Why do we observe Palm Sunday and when did this tradition begin? Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem five days before his crucifixion. Scripture tells us that he rode a donkey into the Holy City during Passover to symbolize that he was the King of Kings and Prince of Peace.

However, Palm Sunday is not merely about discovering and affirming Jesus' identity, but it is also about recognizing the reality and power of evil. John Kelman wrote in his book, Thoughts on Things Eternal, that Palm Sunday was a “pageant of royalty and death.” He's right, for this festive parade signaled the beginning of the most crucial week in history, Holy Week.

Historians tell us that Christians began to reenact this event in the life of Christ in the fourth century. They would assemble on the Mount of Olives and read the Palm Sunday story from one of the Gospels. Waving their palm branches, they would proceed to travel the same route that Jesus did when he entered the city.

In time, the observance spread from Jerusalem to other parts of the world. Christians in Spain picked up this tradition in the fifth century, France in the seventh century, Britain in the eighth century and Rome in the twelfth century.

This morning, there are two major questions that I wish to address that this text raises. The first is this. **What do you have that the Lord needs?**

This question emerged from the instructions that Jesus gave his disciples prior to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Upon sending his disciples into the city to retrieve a donkey for him to ride, Jesus said, “If anyone asks you why you are untying it, tell them the Lord needs it” Luke 19:31.

You understand where my first question comes from, don't you? I confess it is a bit awkward to talk about what we have that the Lord needs. We believe that God is sovereign and needs no other to exist. However, He chooses to use us as partners in His work in this world and this is why we can ask this question. As a matter of fact, it is why we must ask this question.

This raises other questions, though. **What is God's work in which He offers us a partnership?** I like to describe it in two ways. God's work is telling and touching. It is telling people about Him and touching people when and where they are hurting. From the beginning of time, God has used people to help people.

So, what do you have that Jesus needs? Answer this question by asking a couple of more. What do the people around you need and what do you have that can help meet those needs? Take an inventory of their needs as well as your assets and abilities. What can you do with your hands? Where can you go with your feet? What can you say with your tongue? What can you provide with your resources?

A little boy listened as his dad said the blessing before a meal. His father prayed that God would help the hungry people in the world. When he finished his prayer, the little boy looked at his father and said, “Dad, you can answer that prayer by sharing some of the garden vegetables with our neighbor.”

Why would a person want to offer Jesus his or her time, talents and resources to meet others' needs? Anything we offer the Lord will make the world a better place and us better

people. He will bring the best out in us as He connects our talents and resources to those that need it.

The other major question that arises from this text is the flip side of the first one. **What does the Lord have that you need?** This question evolved from the last part of the story. As Jesus approached Jerusalem while riding on the donkey, what did he do? Luke recorded that he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes” Luke 19:41-42.

What does Jesus have that you and I need? What did he have that they needed and he wanted to provide for them? He had the way to peace, individually and collectively. What a gift he was prepared to give them and they missed when they rejected him and his message. How it broke his heart!

What does Jesus have that you and I need? It can be summed up in one beautiful word, peace. Do you know anyone that is not searching for peace? I don't. However, I know many people that have never found it.

Perhaps this is because they misunderstand it. Peace is not, as many think, the absence of something as much as it is the presence of someone. It is not the absence of conflict, turmoil, tension, fear, problems or temptations. It is the presence of someone that can supply the guidance, wisdom, courage, strength, confidence, comfort and forgiveness that you and I need as we encounter life's responsibilities and challenges. It is the presence of someone that can help us avoid conflict or bring enemies together and turn them into friends. And Jesus knew that he was the one that could do these things. How his heart broke when he knew that he would be rejected rather than embraced as the week progressed.

Recently, I quoted Martin Buber's answer to the age-old question, “Where is God?” This Jewish philosopher and theologian replied when asked, “God is between people. He is found in relationships. God fills the space between us so that we are connected, not separated from others.”

Dr. Phil McGraw, America's counselor and talk show host went to a kindergarten class to talk to the students about the war with Iraq. During the conversation, one little boy asked him, “Do you know why we are at war?” Dr. Phil looked at him and asked why. This child replied, “Because they ran out of words.”

It seems that the kindergarten teacher had taught her class that violence occurs when people quit talking to each other. “When you run out of words, then you start fighting,” she told them. “So, keep talking until you work out your differences.”

Through common sense and spiritual insight, Jesus saw Jerusalem lying in rubble and many of her citizens under the heap. As he gazed upon the city, he knew that peace was not on the horizon but violence. What made his vision more tragic was that this bloodshed and destruction could have been avoided had people listened to and followed him. He was the Prince of Peace that was eager to bring “peace on earth good will toward men.” Surely his words rang in their ears forty years later when the Romans leveled the Holy City.

Hopefully we can hear his words on this Palm Sunday and learn from the mistakes of the first century leaders. How tragic it would be to hear him say to us, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.”

Our young people have taught me a song written by Paul Baloche that I appreciate. It speaks of our need to see Jesus, hear his message and respond to his invitation to a life of peace and love.

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart.

I want to see you. I want to see you.

To see you high and lifted up; shining in the light of your glory.

Pour out your power and love as we sing holy, holy, holy.”

May this song be our prayer on this Palm Sunday.