

LUKE 19:28-40

Jesus began the descent to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called Olivet, he sent two of his disciples with these instructions: *Go to the village opposite. As you enter it you will find tethered there a colt which no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks why are you untying it, say, "Our Master needs it."*

The two went on their errand and found as he had told them. And while they were untying the colt, its owners asked, "Why are you untying that colt?" They answered, "Our Master needs it." So they brought the colt to Jesus.

Then they threw their cloaks on the colt for Jesus to mount and they carpeted the road with them as they went on his way. And now, as he approached the descent from the Mount of Olives, the whole company of his disciples in their joy began to sing aloud the praises of God for all the great things they had seen: "Blessings on him who comes as king in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, glory in highest heaven!"

Some Pharisees who were in the crowd said to him, "Master, reprimand your disciples." He answered, *I tell you, if my disciples keep silence, the stones will shout aloud.*

When he came in sight of the city, he wept over it and said, *If only you had known on this great day the way that leads to peace! But, no, it is hidden from your sight. For a time will come upon you, when your enemies will set up siege-works against you, they will encircle you and hem you in at every point. They will bring you to the ground, you and your children within your walls, and not leave you one stone standing on another because you did not recognize God's moment when it came.*

Then he went into the temple and began driving out the traders, with these words: *Scriptures says, "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a robber's cave."*

Day by day he taught in the temple. And the chief priests and lawyers were bent on making an end of him, with the support of the leading citizens, but found they were helpless because the people all hung upon his words.

GOD'S MOMENT

Luke 19:28-40

If you are to achieve greatness in this life, some people will worship you and others will revile you. How many of history's great leaders have been assassinated? Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., JFK, Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus of Nazareth, to name just a few. And what did they all share in common? What was it that made them so popular with some and so dangerous to others?

At face value, it would appear that those who adored them were predominantly common folks, and in particular, those who clung to the lower rungs of their society; those who were fed crumbs from the tables of the rich; those who begged on the streets; those who were racially profiled; the underprivileged; those whom life had left behind; those in desperate need of a reason to hope.

And it is precisely because of their appeal to the masses that they became targets of assassins. Power brokers do not want their advantageous positions in life threatened. They do not want the veil covering their corruption to be lifted. They want to continue to eat, drink and be merry while others starve and pick through garbage for their meals. They want the world to work for them and to hell with everyone else.

What did Jesus do to earn himself a tortuous execution on a cross between two others charged with insurrection? You know what he did? Through his continuous confrontations with the scribes and doctors of the Law, he got under the skin of the establishment authority. He got people all riled up over injustices to women, the poor and those considered to be of the lower classes and those who were labeled and treated as if they were unclean.

He drew large crowds to his sermons; his disciples were annoying people who found him to be a rabble rouser; he healed the sick that none of their physicians could cure; he constantly called them out and shamed them in the public marketplace; and his activism was beginning to change the consciousness of his followers. But the last straw was his confrontation in the

temple with merchants over the week of the Passover Feast. How dare him! This was the best week of the year to make sales and reap profits. It was Jerusalem's Black Friday week as it were. You could cheat people that week and they would gladly pay. So something had to be done. *And the chief priests and lawyers were bent on making an end of him, with the support of the leading citizens, but found they were helpless because the people were all hanging upon his words.*

So now what? Time to call Rome. With all of his talk about the coming of God's kingdom—and weren't his disciples chanting, *Blessings on him who comes as **king** in the name of the Lord!?*—how easy would it be to portray him as an insurrectionist and a danger to the empire? Child's work. And believe me, the Romans were as sensitive as today's Chinese government to any hint of a revolutionary. Peace at all costs! It was just Jesus they were after. None of his followers were worth their time of day. Just cut off the head of the snake. For the Romans had learned their lesson the hard way with the Galilean uprisings and wanted no part of another bloody episode of civil unrest. So in spite of his popularity with the masses, Jesus alone was the target and really had no chance of escape. During his interrogation, Pilate may have had his reservations, but keeping the peace triumphed over any other concerns he might have had. Guilty as charged!

So what is the lesson for us in 2020, two millennia later? I think the words of Jesus in the outskirts of Jerusalem still speak volumes: *When he came in sight of the city, he wept over it and said, "If only you had known on this great day the way that leads to peace! But, no, it is hidden from your sight...you did not recognize God's moment when it came."*

My goodness, would Jesus weep over us? I don't suppose we are any worse than they were, but we are certainly no better. When you consider the growing disparity between the upper 10 percent and the rest of the world, the statistics are absolutely alarming: Half of the global population—three billion people—live on less than \$2.50 a day and over a billion of those live in extreme poverty on about \$1.50 per day. Even more staggering, UNICEF

estimates that 22,000 children a day die from poverty.

The world has the resources to deal with this, but it is sadly lacking in commitment. Go figure that nearly half of the food grown in the United States is thrown away each year. Our waste is appalling. And unfortunately, we can't just gather that up and send it overseas. Many of us will remember our mothers warning us to eat everything on our plates because there were lots of starving Chinese who would love to have it. But there are plenty of people in our own country and in our own community who are nutritionally challenged. Every time I shop, I buy something for the food pantry. And even though I can't make a dent in what's needed, I can do my part.

Much of the solution is a change in consciousness accompanied by an enhanced commitment. If we want peace in the world, we have to do the things that make for peace. There are many ways to do that, but if people's bellies are filled, there will be more harmony among us. As followers of Jesus, we have to do more than wave our palms and cry, "Hosanna." We must call out our government when it wants to bump 700,000 people from the SNAP program. Thank God a federal judge stopped that!

We must recognize God's moment when it arrives. I believe God's moment is always here. It is calling for a change in our consciousness and our attitude toward our less fortunate neighbors. A lot of us will not suffer any hardship from the virus other than boredom in staying at home. But millions will. Hundreds of thousands of lower income jobs have disappeared and many will not come back. Government checks will help for awhile, but it will take years for us to reach full employment again—if ever. Now we pay for extending enormous tax cuts for those who don't need them and for weakening the fiber of our social safety nets. The burden will fall as usual upon those who are most vulnerable.

Palm Sunday is a sobering wake-up call. We cannot do business as usual anymore. A lot is going to be happening in the months ahead. We will all be making lots of decisions and if we have discovered anything from our virus experiences, it should be that no one lives in

isolation from the whole and that each person's decisions impact a lot more people than just ourselves. We must move away from self-absorbed toward self-less.

We can do it and we must do it. God's Moment is here. Let each of us today commit ourselves to heeding the call.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap April 5, 2020