

Emmaus Road Sermon  
March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday  
Anita Rediger

“Order Your Disciples to Stop!”

Every now and then it happens. Not only do I not pay attention to where I parked the car in the big box store parking lot, but I absentmindedly find myself attempting to unlock a vehicle that isn't my own! Always a bit of an unsettling experience...**what if the owner had been looking!**

Several years ago, Martin's father was visiting at 4-H fair time. Grosspapa had looked around the fair and then was ready to go sit down for awhile. He returned to our old red Malibu station wagon for a nap. A good while later, Martin returned to the car, but DID NOT find Grosspapa. However in looking down the line of cars just a bit, Martin discovered his father sound asleep in someone else's car. We always wondered what kind of interesting conversation would have taken place if the owner of the car had returned to find an old, non-English speaking man in the front seat! Of course, Grosspapa said brusquely (and a little bit embarrassed), “Macht's nicht!”

Today we “celebrate” Palm Sunday. It's a strange day. We celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, palm branches waving, people rejoicing and then we seem to plummet into the reality of Holy Week. And, even before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on this very same day, we hear of his lament and his tears over the city; “If you, even you, had only recognized the things that make for peace...” What are we to do with what appears as such a “short-lived” celebration?

Like thousands of others, Jesus had been traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. (Luke 19) On his way to Jerusalem he passed through Jericho. He had met a man named Zaccheus, a chief tax collector. Zaccheus was a man with a foot “in each camp” so to speak, a man who collaborated with the Romans AND was one of the children of Abraham. Zaccheus -a man who shared in the domination of the Roman Empire at the expense of his own people – for his own personal gain! No wonder he was despised by his brethren! So when Jesus invited himself to Zaccheus' house for dinner – EVERYONE began to grumble!! And for good reason! He was making life difficult for many of them! (Jesus, however, reminds the gathering... the Son of Man came for this very purpose...to seek out, and to save...to heal...those who are lost.) Even though the evidence of Zaccheus' past was before him, Jesus saw new possibilities for his future!

The Gospel account continues, “As they were listening, Jesus went on to tell a parable. Jesus told this story “because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” “So Jesus said, ‘A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves. The nobleman gave a few of his servants some money, “pounds” and instructed them to “carry out his business until he came back...” The parable goes on to tell us that the citizens of this country hated the nobleman and that they sent a delegation after him, saying, “We do not want this man to rule over us!”

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Let's pause and remind ourselves again of the context. How well this crowd knew about unwanted rulers and those "traitors" who did their dirty work! And, let's imagine Zaccheus standing beside Jesus as he speaks to the gathering crowd.! Those in the crowd must have found themselves thinking about their current situation.

They knew of Herod's travels to Rome – the seat of royal power and of his collaborators! One of them is standing right before them! How hard it was for them to see Zaccheus as Jesus saw him! The parable continues by telling us of the actions of some of the slaves, the ones entrusted with the nobleman's wealth. The last servant to be interviewed by the nobleman is anxious and frightened. He comes saying, "Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow." *The servant calls the man "Lord" but the relationship is one of distrust and fear.* The servant's fears of this harsh ruler are confirmed by the final words of the story. This "Lord's" final edict – "...as for those who didn't want me to be king over them – bring them here and slaughter them in my presence." The frightened servant was right on! Power and control were ultimate!

Our evening's text begins at this point: "After Jesus had told this story, "he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." Jesus' story rings in his followers ears. Now, Jesus sends two of his disciples ahead, into the village. They are instructed to look for a colt that has never been sat upon. When they find it they are to untie it and to bring it to him. Jesus even offers them words to speak if perchance someone asks, "Why are you untying the colt?"

(Kelly's experience this week at DS Woods with the unexpected woman in her car)

The disciples leave and find it just as Jesus had told them and sure enough, right when they are untying the colt the owners arrive and ask "Why...??" The disciples respond, "The *Lord* has need of it." In contrast to the fearful, *therefore disobedient*, slave of the parable, these two disciples were given simple instructions and, amazingly, do exactly as they've been told. They, too, call their master "Lord", but their actions bear witness to a very different relationship. In contrast to the frightened slave of the parable, these two trust the way and words of Jesus. They know Jesus as one who "fleshes out" the kingdom of God – a very different expression of kingdom than that of the kingdom of Rome. They respond to Jesus out of a posture of profound trust – at their own peril - and we are given a glimpse of true discipleship.

As Jesus proceeds triumphantly toward Jerusalem, not just two but a "whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully with and loud voice." They bless him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. At the height of this joyful procession, the Pharisees demand, "*Teacher, order your disciples to stop!*" Why this interruption!?! Perhaps, the Pharisees are able to "see" the inevitable collision which lies ahead. As Jesus enters Jerusalem from the east - in an ordinary robe and riding on the foal of a donkey, (picture that!) - from the west a very different procession may well have been underway. It was

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the time of the Passover and Jerusalem was swelling with Jewish pilgrims. Pilate, the governor, of Judea was also arriving in Jerusalem. Pilate, draped in the trappings of imperial power moved in to be sure that any hint of insurrection would be quickly quenched. Passover – the celebration of God’s deliverance from the hand of the Egyptians could quickly turn into an insurrection against Rome. As Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on the back of a donkey – a lowly working animal, Rome enters with soldiers, horses, spears and banners proclaiming, “Caesar is Lord,” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” – Caesar that is!”

No wonder the Pharisees order Jesus to quiet his disciples! There would be big trouble if Jesus continued in this way. And it wouldn’t only be “trouble” for Jesus, it would mean “trouble” for them and their way of life! Rome wouldn’t like it – and that wouldn’t be good for them either! Interesting, isn’t it...how much trouble the Pharisees had with a guy like Zaccheus, because of his affiliation with Rome – yet they, too, seemed to have “a foot in each camp.” (remember the graven images on the coins they carried in their pockets!) Jesus says to the Pharisees, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones themselves would shout out.” Stones (or bricks) won’t be thrown, but they will cry out!

This evening, the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke has offered us a series of contrasts – one right on top of the other.

1. Zacchaeus and the “faithful” crowd gathered around Jesus-

- The contrast of how we choose to see people – to minimize their humanity with labels and condemnation or - as we considered two weeks ago – as followers of Jesus given the opportunity to see everything, everyone “in Christ” – where possibility for the new is *ever* before us.

2. the contrast of the Servant of the Nobleman and the two faithful disciples of Jesus; also the multitude of followers celebrating Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the Pharisees.

- The contrast between choosing safety & security over faithfulness to the way of Jesus – that is choosing “short-term” security over the resurrection security of Jesus.

3. the poor, no-name, servant-teacher from Nazareth in contrast to the crushing power of Rome – with its wealth, it’s might and it’s prestige...

- The contrast of the use of power – as a weapon of control or as a gift which releases others to greater freedom.

We are at the beginning of Holy Week. In this “Last Week, “choices are coming at Jesus daily. These same choices are ours, as well...also coming daily. How hard it is for me *to even* want see those who exploit me or intimidate me as Jesus sees them! How well, I recognize myself in the fearful, suspicious actions of the nobleman’s servant! How can I protect myself? How can I keep my world “safe”? And, I also recognize myself in the “hushing” words of the Pharisees. Are others required to “be quiet” so that my voice can be heard?

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The celebration of Palm Sunday seems so short-lived. In only a few short days, Jesus will hang on the cross. At times it does seem like that the only thing left is for the “stones to cry out. Yet, Easter is the proclamation of new life. Are we preparing ourselves to rejoice in the new life that comes to us in Jesus – the Jesus who made choices – really hard and costly choices – resurrection choices that roll away tombstones and call the dead to new life?

The scriptures give us the image of “living stones.” 1 Pet.2:5 Is Jesus inviting us to be the stones which cry out in witness to the way of the kingdom of God – a way which anticipates newness in our living, our serving and in our seeing? Our invitation comes to us as we watch Jesus as he moves toward the crucifixion. Do we have the courage to go with him? Do we have the courage to become “living stones?” AMEN