

Hearts in the Crowd  
Luke 19:28–48  
April 9–10, 2022  
Palm Sunday

*The Triumphal Entry*

**Luke 19:28** And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” <sup>35</sup> And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” <sup>39</sup> And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” <sup>40</sup> He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

*Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem*

**Luke 19:41** And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side <sup>44</sup> and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

*Jesus Cleanses the Temple*

**Luke 19:45** And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, <sup>46</sup> saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

**Luke 19:47** And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, <sup>48</sup> but

they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Lent is sure not like Advent. Advent begins with the first Sunday of the new church year. It builds to the glorious celebration of the incarnation of the Son of God.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. We are told: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

And then we have weeks of remembering our Lord's lonely path toward Good Friday. That cross in the wall behind me is a beautiful piece of design. But the road to the cross was all but pretty.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was provocative. The palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism. Jerusalem and Judea were occupied by Roman soldiers. Pontus Pilate was a Roman governor. He represented the Roman emperor Tiberius. The crowd hated the Romans. They wanted them gone, vaporized. They clamored for Jesus to step forth as messiah, the anointed one, the king of a renewed and free Jewish state.

This is why v. 39 of our reading says: "And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." In other words: tell them to shut up! If the Romans hear that crowds are acclaiming you king, they might slaughter us all.

And that could happen. There was a Roman army battalion right on the temple premises in a place called the Fortress of Antonia, named for the Roman general Marc Anthony, associated with Cleopatra. They could mobilize immediately. Roman security in Jerusalem was tight and ruthless. When they needed to execute dissidents, be it one or many, they were ready. Their preferred method for capital punishment of non-Roman citizens was . . . crucifixion.

Our Luke 19 reading describes a very complex scene. I want to focus on just three things. (1) Who Jesus saw. (2) Why Jesus wept. (3) Where *we* stand.

(1) Who Jesus saw. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey, he saw many kinds of people. I count thirteen different groups. But because of time we'll just look at the first five.

Luke 19	Situated individuals	Major feature
v. 37	1. disciples	Jesus followers (though mixed)
v. 39	2. Pharisees	Generally hostile
v. 40	3. the crowd	A menagerie--Passover week
v. 41–42	4. the city (blinded)	Jerusalem--"The things that make for peace . . . are hidden from your eyes."
v. 43	5. the city in the future (judged)	The city will be leveled, "you and your children within you."
v. 45	6. the temple	A menagerie--Passover week
v. 45	7. those who sold	Financially ambitious, probably ethically compromised
v. 46	8. would-be worshipers	Some were there for all that God's intended "house of prayer" could offer.
v. 46	9. "den of robbers"	Exploiting would-be worshippers.
v. 47	10. chief priests	Extra hostile to Jesus.
v. 47	11. scribes	Largely hostile and scholar-bureaucrats supporting the ruling class (chief priests, principal men)
v. 47	12. principal men	The Sanhedrin and their allies
v. 47	13. the people	A menagerie--Passover week

He did not just see faceless masses. He saw different classes and types and alignments of individuals. We know from the Gospels that Jesus took an interest in individuals. I call them "situated individuals" because they represented different situations--social levels and interests and attitudes toward Jesus.

But they were individuals to Jesus. He was God incarnate. The God we find in the Bible is personal. Every human being is made in God's image. We all matter to

God. All these characters in the Palm Sunday narrative mattered personally to God the Father and to his incarnate Son.

So who did Jesus see? (1) He saw disciples. The word means pupils or learners. Some were casual, but many were dead serious. Later that week the best of them, the 12, would desert Jesus. One of them would hand him over to the Romans. But as a group they were his most loyal supporters in the crowd.

(2) He saw Pharisees. These were highly trained, deeply committed adherents of a certain understanding of the Old Testament and ancestral tradition. A few ended up believing in Jesus, like Nicodemus and later Paul. But most opposed Jesus. They were always looking for ways to show him up and bring him down.

(3) He saw the crowd. I call it a menagerie because it was kind of like spring break week in Florida--people from everywhere were streaming into Jerusalem for the annual Passover feast. The Passover sacrifice instituted by Moses back at the time of the Exodus would be celebrated later that week. It is highly symbolic that Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin at just that time when the Exodus Passover would be observed.

(4) and (5) He saw the city as a whole. He lamented what lay ahead. He knew the city would reject him. He called every person to faith in him and peace with God. But they refused to see. Jesus' true status as their king and savior was hidden from their eyes.

Most of them responded with opposition to him. The result was judgment by God. This happened about 40 years later, in AD 70, when factions in the city fought against each other in civil war fashion. And then what these factions started, the Romans finished, like the Russians invading Kiev. But the Romans in Jerusalem succeeded.

A full chart would show eight more groups of situated individuals. They all mattered to Jesus. Over his three years of preaching and his annual visits to Jerusalem, he had addressed them all directly or indirectly.

Palm Sunday was not like the debut of a new celebrity on the scene. It was a like a nationally known figure making yet another visit, but with the interesting twist of

riding into town, not on a war horse like a proper man of power, but on a lowly donkey. In our terms, he was not riding a tank but a Tesla.

Jesus signaled that the crowd rightly hailed him as king when the Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." He was indeed "the King who comes in the name of the Lord." But the donkey signaled he was a different kind of king.

So that's a little about who all Jesus saw. He saw people like you and me, people of different backgrounds, ages, occupations, aspirations, and social classes. If you had been there that day, Jesus would have known exactly who you were.

And you know something? His heart would have gone out to you. In fact it did go out to you. This brings us to

(2) Why Jesus wept. V. 41 says: "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it." He wept because he cared. God so loved the world that he sent his Son, this Jesus, so that everyone who believes in him might know forgiveness, fresh hope, true direction, meaningful purpose, and a quality of life that the Bible calls "everlasting." That includes eternity in heaven. But it starts in this life when we repent of our way and turn to Jesus Christ and his way.

That's a beautiful reality for true believers. But Jesus wept because he knew that as a whole, the crowds hailing him that day were fickle and opportunistic. They wanted a political savior to rid them of the Romans. They wanted someone who could give them free bread and fish by a miracle. They thought it was cool that Jesus sometimes healed the sick and even raised the dead. Awesome! Three cheers! Bring it on Jesus!

But Jesus had not come to be a sideshow. His ministry was not a publicity stunt. He came to call disciples. He came to do the will of his Father in heaven. He came to advance the kingdom of his heavenly Father on this earth. He came to fulfill God's ancient promises to bear the sins of the world going back to Adam and Eve and going forward until he returns.

He came to defeat death by his resurrection. He came to send his Holy Spirit and bless the nations through the gospel and the church. He came to ascend to the Father and intercede for us at the Father's right hand. He came to share our lives and wipe away our sins and strengthen us in righteousness and make us witnesses to God's mercy and love and rule.

He came to make our prayers productive, our marriages effective in his service, our business dealings honest, our relationships authentic, and our love for others self-sacrificial. He came to make this church, every church, a house of prayer and not a den of robbers.

For all the good things Jesus had in mind in coming--he knew that what actually awaited in the near term was not wild welcome and acclaim. What awaited was Good Friday.

And so he wept. Tears flowed at the pathos of all these individuals to whom he had extended himself, most of whom would soon support his execution. He wept for all for whom he would soon die. He saw those hearts in the crowd. He also looked through the centuries and saw us too. He wept for you and for me.

This brings me to (3) Where *we* stand.

I read a book recently about *Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel*.<sup>1</sup> It's a book about the church in the US. This book identifies eight patterns of belief in name only--apparent faith in Christ, but actually just a social activity or denominational affiliation or even a political alignment in Jesus' name.

Here are eight false faith syndromes. In each case people affirm Jesus like many did on Palm Sunday. But is it the faith of the true church? Or just crowd clamor?

(1) The Country Club Christian. This person views church as a social connection. But Jesus called for repentance and discipleship, not a pleasant association of nice people using the church as a place to be seen and to schmooze with other beautiful people like them.

(2) The Christmas and Easter Christian. We all note their seasonal appearance. It's always good to attend church. But fellowship with Christ and the communion of saints calls for more than symbolic devotion on two holy days annually.

(3) The God and Country Christian. Being American and voting American values is the priority here. But Jesus distinguished between rendering to Caesar and rendering to God. He called to seek first God's kingdom. This not the same as the welfare of the political vision that you think is best for your country.

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody, 2019).

(4) The Liberal Social Justice Christian. If the God and Country Christian is prone to envision the messianic kingdom in right-wing terms, the Liberal Social Justice Christian is pushing a left-leaning social agenda in Jesus' name. But the saving knowledge of God through personal faith in Christ is not first of all a social crusade, though such faith may well require social action.

(5) The Moralistic Therapeutic Deist. This can be called "the good guy next door" Christian. That guy believes being nice to others and caring is the point of religion, all religions, including Christianity which is no different. Human empathy and love are the major redemptive force in the world, plus they make you feel good about yourself when you exercise them. But Jesus called for being born again and rejected the notion that human do-gooding was sufficient to put us right with God.

(6) The Generational Catholic. I would add here generational anything, because we run across people in many denominations, and non-denominations, wearing the badge of their family's past religious activity as assurance of their sanctity. Granted: since Catholics are the biggest Christian group worldwide, this syndrome in their ranks is highly noticeable. But Jesus taught salvation through personal trust in him, not through even his own Abrahamic heritage alone, and certainly not through claims like granddad was a Baptist pastor, your aunt was a Pentecostal preacher, or you grew up in an Irish Catholic family, went to Catholic school, and still attend Mass sometimes.

(7) The Mainline Protestant. This is like the Liberal Social Justice Christian without social activism. The Mainline belief system echoes Christian themes but boils down to H. Richard Niebuhr's famous definition: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross." This formulation cannot be squared with Jesus' teaching or mission as the Gospels present them.

(8) The Bible Belt Christian. You might call this the country club Christian of the middle and lower classes. This is typically the person in a part of the US where many still go to church. This person does too, has been baptized, and may even attend services regularly. But their life is not Christ-centered, they are not concerned about holiness, they do not pray and study God's word, and they are not growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because like the folks in the other seven categories, their tie with Jesus is formal and external.

On that first Palm Sunday Jesus saw each heart in the crowd. Today is no different. What does he see? Where is your heart?

One of Jesus best-known and best-loved promises is John 10:10: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Are you plugged in to that abundance? Can Jesus stop weeping over you because you have met personally? Do you know him, pray to and through him, serve him, feel his hand of direction and wisdom, thrive on his rebuke and restoration?

Or are you flying blind, like so many in the crowd about whom Jesus said through tears: "The things that make for peace are hidden from your eyes"?

Not long ago I was reading about the difficulty of Coast Guard rescue pilots flying out of Sitka, Alaska. This account said that the Coast Guard didn't let its helicopter pilots fly lead out of Sitka, no matter how much experience they had at other air stations. First they had to practice difficult landings at specific locations in the region. They had to get their egos battered a little by logging a full winter in the state.

Visibility in Alaska is frequently poor; conditions change quickly. One pilot tells about blindly tunneling through fog in the dark when his co-pilot got "caged." What does that mean? It means the co-pilot lifted his eyes momentarily from his instruments. Without any visual references or a horizon to latch onto, he found it impossible to reorient himself. He lost all sense of direction. Vertigo overwhelmed him. He could no longer help fly the aircraft. The pilot was on his own.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was on his own. Almost all the gaping multitudes were "caged." They lacked Jesus' sense of direction. The confusion of political excitement and crowd fervor jammed their sense of direction. It was only those deeply committed to him, his disciples, who persevered through the fog and turbulence that lay before them. And that was solely by grace through faith.

True disciples. That's who we want to be! God sees our hearts. Escape the cage of the crowds! Let Christ replace cultural Christianity! What does that look like? The last two verses of our gospel reading picture the right response to Jesus.

Whereas leaders "were seeking to destroy him," at the temple as Jesus taught, "all the people were hanging on his words." Hear Jesus, hang on his words, follow him this week and always to the cross, and be saved. That is the Palm Sunday message.