

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

His Pain Our Gain: The Gift of Joy

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it."

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Picture in your mind the Palm Sunday scene going down this road toward the Temple Mount. What are the expressions on everyone's faces?

On the faces of the Palm Sunday crowds? I think they had great big smiles on their faces. They had seen the miracles that Jesus did. Now he is coming as king! Life will be perfect from now on! He will take care of everything for us.

What about the faces of the disciples? I think they were smiling too! I think they saw the crowds and heard the praises and they thought, "Finally, everyone sees what we have seen all along! They see that Jesus is the Messiah! Finally, God's church is victorious as it should be!"

The Pharisees certainly didn't have smiles on their faces! They were angry.

But what about Jesus? What expression did Jesus have on his face this day?

At the Ministry Growth Team study, someone suggested that he had a look of determination on his face. That makes a lot of sense. In one of the Prophet Isaiah's Servant Songs, the Son of God speaks through the prophet and says: "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be

disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame” (Isaiah 50:7). In Luke 9:51, a literal translation of the verse says that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” I’m sure that Jesus often seemed very determined when the disciples looked at him.

But on Palm Sunday, I don’t think that Jesus had a frown on his face. If he had been somber, I can’t imagine that the disciples would have been filled with joy. I know that my teammates often tell me the best thing that I can do for them is to be in a good mood when I walk in the door. My mood sets the mood for the team. If that is true of me, how much more it would have been for Jesus. If you see smiles on the faces of the crowds and smiles on the faces of the disciples, I think you can see a smile on Jesus face too.

Don’t you see him smiling as the disciples fulfill Zechariah’s prophecy without even realizing it? John in his gospel tells us that it was after the resurrection that they realized everything they did was in fulfillment of prophecy?¹ Don’t you have joy when you see a plan coming together. How much more when it is God’s plan. It is the joy of fulfilled prophecy.

Don’t you see him smiling as he finally sees that his work of salvation is about to be accomplished? On Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus would tell his disciples: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16).

Don’t you see him smiling as he hears the praises of this Palm Sunday crowd as just a faint echo of a world praising him? Right after this Palm Sunday procession, some Greeks want to see Jesus. Listen to his response as “the world” starts coming to know him: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

I think that Jesus was smiling. Not because he was ignorant of what lay ahead, but because he could see through his pain to our gain. The first Palm Sunday crowd was just a foreshadowing of the 2 billion people who are praising him this Palm Sunday around the world. The passage that has been running through my mind throughout this past week is this one from Hebrews 12:

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

As we look into Jesus’ face on Palm Sunday, we receive the gift of joy. Not the ignorant joy of the crowds and the disciples, but the informed joy of the Savior that inspires us to endure our crosses.

1. Ignorant Joy

Have you ever experienced “ignorant joy”? I want it to sound harsh. It is a lie that Satan uses to draw many people away from God.

¹ At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him (John 19:12).

The Palm Sunday crowds were filled with joy, but it was ignorant joy. They thought that when they crowned Jesus, the miracle worker, as king, then the world would be perfect for them.

That ignorant joy is still around us today. The Bible reveals God as a miracle worker. Just this week I read again at the beginning of the book of Joshua, how God dried up the Jordan River at flood stage so that the Israelites could cross over on dry ground. Then they marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came tumbling down.

If God is a miracle worker, then do so many bad things happen? This past week, Vincent, Mary and Michael Rizzo were killed by a drunk driver. Our St. Paul's family is connected to this family. How could such a tragedy happen?

If God is a miracle worker, why is there such injustice in the world?

Perhaps you know someone who isn't here in worship today because God disappointed them in this way.

The ignorant joy of the disciples is the error of thinking we are already enjoying the church triumphant. How many Christians have experienced short-term joy, excited about the feeling of God's love and care, but then found that others didn't have the enthusiasm they do, that they saw hypocrisy and judgmentalism in the church. And that bright burning enthusiasm dies out because life in the church is not one victory after the next.

But it is not just in others. It is in all of us. Discouragement and despair are never far from anyone of us because life isn't perfect and the church is not victorious.

But Jesus could see past his pain to our gain. And that is an invitation to us as well. To look past the present joys and present sorrows to the eternal gain. The passage that I have been thinking about all week goes on:

“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2-3).

That's what we are about to do this Holy Week. We are about to join with Jesus, to see what he endured so that we are not surprised that this is a world of suffering and pain. But that we see the joy set before us and that we too shall sit down at the right hand of God.

I would encourage you to spend some time this week just looking at a city: The Holy City of God in Revelation 21 and 22. Why do we read the Bible over and over again? It isn't because we have forgotten the stories. It is so that God's view becomes our view, that our view of the City of God prepared for us in heaven, the joy set before us, becomes clearer and clearer.

It is when we have that clear vision of the joy that awaits us, that we have the inspired joy that will last through pain.

Our path isn't easy. It is painful being a parent, discipling a child when all you want to do is be their buddy.

It isn't easy being a church leader. Often you hear the joke that being in the ministry isn't bad except for the people. When you lead, you will be criticized. And it hurts. You can start to think, what is the use!

It isn't easy being a Christian. Jesus said that if we were going to follow him we would have to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him. What is that cross? To say "no" to so many of the sinful desires that well up within our hearts. To say "no" to sexual desires outside of marriage. To say "no" to the desire to judge and condemn others. To say "no" to abuse of alcohol. To say "no" to whatever sinful action we do to make ourselves feel better.

For the joy set before him! Jesus looked beyond temporal joy to the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of salvation. Join him and looking beyond that pain to the victory.

It is that inspired joy that allows us to be joyful even in the face of death. This has been a week of funerals for many of us. But remember Jesus' joy as he rode into Jerusalem that day. It was not an ignorant joy, being happy in the moment. It as an informed joy, knowing the prophecies were fulfilled and the joy of salvation accomplished.

This is Jesus' joy that day:

My course is run.
Praise God, my course is run,
My Father welcomes me.
Farewell, my friends,
my work on earth is done,
The heav'nly goal I see.
I hear my Father's praises voicing,
I leave this world with great rejoicing.
My course is run. My course is run.

This isn't quite the way the hymn goes. It isn't just the Savior who was filled with joy as he saw his work about to be accomplished. We can be too. This is actually a hymn that I stumbled across when my mother died. I changed just a few words in the verse above. This is actually the way it reads. This is the joy that is set before us.

My course is run.
Praise God, my course is run,
My Savior welcomes me.
Farewell, my friends,
my work on earth is done,
The heav'nly goal I see.
My dear Redeemer's praises voicing,
I leave this world with great rejoicing.
My course is run. My course is run.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 599)

My Next Steps to Receive the Gift of Joy

- **Memorize the steps of the Savior:** “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2-3).
- **Follow the steps of the Savior:** Read Philippians 2:1-11 and see the connection between the contented-serving-of-others and Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation.
- **Focus on the joy to come:** Enjoy Revelation 21 and 22. Imagine what a day would be like in this place. How much pain and frustration are you willing to go through before you experience this joy?

GroupWork

1. Share a day that stands out in your mind as one of the most enjoyable days of your life.
2. Read John 12:12-19. Palm Sunday is one of very few events recorded in all four gospels which highlights its importance. What would have made this a memorable, enjoyable day for the crowds and for the disciples?
3. Read Hebrews 12:2-3. What do you think the author meant by “the joy set before him”? What would have given Jesus joy on Palm Sunday?
4. Read Philippians 2:1-11. What would make Paul’s joy complete? Would Jesus find joy in that same thing?
5. How are Jesus’ humiliation (Philippians 2:6-8) and Jesus’ exaltation (Philippians 2:9-11) related to our call to serve each other?
6. Read again Hebrews 12:2-3. What might cause a person to lose joy or “lose heart and grow weary” in one or more of the following roles?
 - a. As a parent
 - b. As a spouse
 - c. As a employee
 - d. As a friend
7. “For the joy set before him.” What is that joy set before you in one or more of the roles above? What are you looking forward to as you serve others in these roles?
8. Close with prayer, either speaking or singing this hymn:
On my heart imprint your image, Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
That life’s riches, cares, and pleasures Have no power to hide your face.
This the superscription be: Jesus, crucified for me;
Is my life, my hope’s foundation, And my glory and salvation. Amen.

(Christian Worship 319)