

Weeping  
Palm Sunday Meditation  
Luke 19:38-46

The whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power 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 heaven!”

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup> He answered, “I tell you, if these people were silent, the stones would shout out.”

<sup>41</sup> As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup> They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

<sup>45</sup> Then Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, <sup>46</sup> and he said, “It is written,  
‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’  
but you have made it a den of robbers.”

As Luke tells the Palm Sunday story, Jesus and the parade draw close to the capitol city, and as he sees the city and its people, it causes Jesus to weep. He says to no one and to everyone: “If only you had recognized the things that make for peace!” Jesus is now irritated. He’s mad. He’s accusatory. But he’s also, as I hear him, full of sadness. There are worse times ahead, he warns--much worse. Why? Because when God appeared to us plain as day--we didn’t see. When God showed us what is the holy shape of a human life is, we did nothing.

Palm Sunday begins so joyfully. I love this parade. There is such powerful, hopeful energy it. For almost all of us, following Jesus, is something we do on the down low. Most of our following of Jesus happens out of the public eye--decisions we make when no one is watching. That was true for Jesus’ disciples. So much of Jesus’ teaching and healing and preaching takes in small towns, and private spaces, in one-on-one conversations. No one ever sees or knows. But in this parade, the decision to be a follower of Jesus is on full display. Here we are, in the street, publicly declaring our allegiance to Jesus and to the way of God.

Whenever we move worship out of the sanctuary, onto the sidewalk, everybody gets a bit self-conscious. But it’s grand! We are following Jesus--the one who is worthy to be followed! We are marching and shouting and singing! We are “outing” ourselves as followers of the healer, Jesus; the life-giver; Jesus, the one in whom love flowers and grows! The power and grace of God is here. We can feel it! We get behind Jesus. There aren’t a ton

of us, but there are enough. We sense that we are part of this movement--that the reign of God, the new world of love and justice and mercy that Jesus tells us about is possible. Maybe it's even inevitable. If we didn't say that Jesus is God's love in the flesh, even the stones themselves would shout it out!

Suddenly... something goes wrong. In this middle of this triumphant victory march, Jesus pulls up short. Jesus comes near the city and sees it. I don't know what that means. You can't see a whole city from one place. You can't see the people. What does it mean that Jesus "sees" the city?

Do you ever "see" your city? See it as it really is?

Cities are marvelous things. I've loved cities since I was a boy. No city more than New York. The size. Huge architectural wonders of glass and steel. Block after block for miles in every direction. And the mass of humanity! Sidewalks teeming with people of every shape and size and color. Museums and universities and hospitals and great corporations. Cities are the best of humankind--people cooperating and sharing space and living together.

Cities also show us the worst of who we are. The fraud and the cheating; the exploitation, the violence. Cities are also where we see the concentration of great wealth and great unmet human needs.

Jesus looks at this city and starts... weeping. The city makes him cry. Why? What does he see? The Romans, for sure. The heavily-armed soldiers keeping the peace. He sees the gross opulence. Taxes drained the from people trickle upward here, where the people's money builds palaces of the rich. Jesus sees those who aren't rich--the worst off of whom sit at the gates of the city, begging for scraps. All around the edges of the city, in quiet corners, the sick and dying suffer unseen.

Jesus wanted them to see, to know, that there's another way.

- Mercy can be woven into the justice system; we can give each other second chances
- A society can care for every person and upholds each person's God-given dignity.
- We can refuse, as a culture, to use violence to solve problems

But here, in this city, violence was perfected like an artform. People systematically denied their human rights. Unashamed inequality. The earth's abundance hoarded by some, denied to others. Jesus sees this city for what it is. And he's mad. And he's sad for. "If only you had known the things that make for peace."

Just a few minutes ago, when we were marching up with Jesus, we thought "maybe goodness will win." Maybe we are on the cusp of a new day, a new hope.

Jesus stops us short. He looks at us, and weeps. He goes to the Temple and rages against the machinery of greed and inhumanity; he rages at the way we desecrate what God has made holy.

As we begin this week, I want you to look. Look over Jesus' shoulder at our own city. Don't look at the tall buildings. Don't look at the gleaming glass office towers or the fancy restaurants or the wealthy suburbs. Look around the edges of the city, in the quiet corners. Underneath bridges and highway overpasses. Behind grocery stores, where people rifle through dumpsters. Look in the classrooms of the schools that are "failing." In the emergency rooms. In the jails.

Look with the eyes of Jesus at our own city. What do you see?