

**The Paradox of the Cross**  
**Palm/Passion Sunday**  
**Luke 19: 28- 40**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

Disney land officially opened in 1955. At the dedication ceremonies Walt Disney proclaimed, "I don't want the public to see the world they live in while they're here. I want them to feel they're in another world... To all who come to this happy place, welcome. Disneyland is your land. Wouldn't it be nice if the real world was always a happy place? If it was, we wouldn't need Jesus.

When we think of Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus boldly parading into Jerusalem. The people were already there in droves to celebrate the Passover. When Jesus showed up acting like the King who comes in the name of the Lord, they went wild. Many of the pilgrims threw their cloaks on the ground before him. Others cut palm branches off nearby trees and waved them as their ancestors did whenever their kings rode into Jerusalem after winning a great victory.

Since no kings reigned in Jerusalem for over 500 years this spontaneous demonstration had enormous implications. Jesus' reputation for being a prophet, healer and teacher was self evident in Judea. Not surprisingly, the people were hoping Jesus was the Messiah. On the other hand, the Pharisees, the temple priests and other religious leaders didn't believe Jesus was the Anointed One. Fearing reprisals from the Romans for this nationalistic outburst, they implored Jesus to make the people stop shouting "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Instead of telling them to stop, Jesus endorsed their acclamations when he declared, "I tell you, if they (the people) were silent, the stones would shout!"

If the story of Jesus parading into Jerusalem ended there, it would a happy ending with everyone would living happily ever after. But Jerusalem isn't Disneyland and Jesus is no prince charming.

Jerusalem represents the real world Uncle Walt didn't want us to see when we visit Disneyland. The real world, the world we live in, needs to be saved, not from a prince charming who breaks evil spells with a kiss but from the Prince of Peace who saved us from sin and death by taking our place on his cross.

Ultimately, there is a happy ending to this story but if you think it happened on Palm Sunday, you're jumping the gun. Before this happy ending can really come true, there's still a long and terrible way to go.

Where's does this terrible way lead to? The foot of the cross. Why the foot of the cross? Because the foot of the cross is where we enter into Christ's suffering and die with him. At the foot of his cross you begin to experience the pain of Good Friday.

How do you experience the pain of Good Friday? You start by honestly confronting yourself, seeing how the things you have done and the things you should not have done have distorted your spirit beyond recognition. Remember, you were created in the image of God but you broke that image by your sins. Acknowledging your sin and facing your brokenness is painful, as it should be.

It's imperative we experience that pain because pain tells you something's terribly wrong but also that that you're still spiritually alive. If you can't feel the pain, that's a bad sign. You lost your humanity.

It's painful to acknowledge the damage you've done to yourself and the people you've hurt. It's especially painful to experience Jesus' suffering and dying because of you. But your suffering, mysteriously joined with Christ's suffering brings forgiveness when you're ready to let your sin die so Christ can be raised up from those stone cold empty spaces in your life.

During Holy week especially we need to acknowledge that wall separating us from God that was put there by you and me. Every time you ignore God's still small voice and every time you willfully make the wrong decision, every time you lie, steal or cheat, that's when you placed another stone in your wall. Nothing you can do, not even multiple deeds of kindness and acts of love can make those stones disappear. Only one man can tear down that wall. His name is Jesus.

Of course, if you choose keep these stones by detouring around the cross you'll miss the miracle of the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, God becoming one of us to make friendship with God possible. Deleting Good Friday only leaves you with the Gospel According to Disney, a "happy" gospel of cheap grace. What we really need is the Gospel of costly grace, won for us by Christ at a terrible price.

Although grace is ours for the asking, paradoxically God's grace comes at a high price. To experience this grace, you must deliberately deny yourself of anything keeping you from trusting and obeying your hunger and thirst for God. We were born with that hunger and thirst, both were encoded into our spiritual DNA so only God in Christ can satisfy our hungry and thirsty hearts. As the disciple John said to Jesus in the Upper Room, "Lord to whom shall we go, for you alone can give us eternal life."

The Beloved Disciple's insight takes us to the next phase of in our redemption. Accepting the gift of grace leads to accepting the burden of discipleship. 'Deny yourself,' that's the first phase. The second is this, "pick up your cross." Some people think "your" cross means gracefully coming to terms with your disappointments in life but that's only part of it. Picking up your cross is a metaphor for embracing your humanity, becoming the human being God

intended you to become at the moment of your conception. It means living out your purpose as a child of God and a disciple of Christ by making sacrifices to bring God's love to those who need it most. Christ died for the many. We are compelled to live for the many.

You know the litany, "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and welcome the stranger." Every time you do this, the Incarnation takes flesh in you. The life of Christ abides in and through you whenever you imitate Christ's attitudes and behaviors. Empowered by Christ's love you can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things. His love never ends and your life begins whenever you risk your life for the sake of the Gospel. That risk ensures you salvation. You are saved to know and enjoy God now and forever in the company of the beloved community.

Finally, Jesus said, "follow me." In the context of Holy Week, following Jesus means following him to the cross.

Like the twelve disciples, we sometimes follow half heartedly. When the chips are down and things get dicey we might deny or desert him when he needs us to stand with him. Even so, we are always forgiven and given that second chance until we get it right.

It's hard embracing these teachings about radical obedience and faithfulness but it was even harder for Jesus. From the time of his threefold temptation in the wilderness up to his greatest temptation in Gethsemane, Jesus struggled with his calling to die for the sins of the world. At any given moment, especially when his friends deserted him and his enemies mocked and crucified him, Jesus was within his rights to change course and run away to Disneyland. Instead, for our sakes and our salvation Jesus chose the hardest way possible to make the happy ending possible.

Bonhoeffer, that great defender of the faith, wrote from a Nazi prison, "When Christ calls you, he bids you to come with him and die." Imagine anyone else inviting you to your death. You'd run away as fast as you can. But Jesus invites you to die with him so you can live with him, in the Kingdom of God on earth and when the time comes, the eternal kingdom in heaven.

Take time out, this week and every week for the rest of your life to follow Jesus to the cross. Die with him so on the third day you experience being raised up to new life, a life of purpose and joy, living in the real world, believing that through his suffering and death on the cross, Christ has already overcome the world.