

Palm Sunday sermon on Pride

April 9, 2017

Good morning. My name is Bob Richardson, and I am the assistant pastor here at G3. I am delighted to be worshipping with you today.

I love a parade. I have a clip that I'd like to show of my favorite parade. While we lived out in Portland, Oregon, our pastor was a fellow named Rick McKinley, and a Father's Day tradition in the McKinley household held that Rick's four kids...Kailee, Josh, Zac, and Bryce...all put on a parade for him. Watch this clip from the 2015 edition. **(SHOW CLIP OF MCKINLEY PARADE)**

A parade as a noun is defined as a "public procession, especially one celebrating a special day or event and including marching bands and floats."

A parade as a verb is defined as to "walk or march in public in a formal procession or in an ostentatious or attention-seeking way."

My second favorite parade was at the Coca Cola 600 a few years ago at Charlotte Motor Speedway and had one display. It was no float or marching band. It looked much like this. **(SHOW CLIP OF STEALTH FIGHTER)** It remains the most impressive technological display I have ever seen. The public address announcer invited the crowd to look north for the oncoming B-2 bomber, and I would estimate that I first spied it when it was two miles to my left. Two miles away to my left I could hear its engines, in my right ear!

Arguably the most important parade in history took place as hundreds of thousands of devout Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover, a community commemoration of the time when God freed them from bondage at the hands of their Egyptian oppressors. **(SHOW PICTURE OF JESUS ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM)**

While Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday is chronicled in all of what we call the gospels, or the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, I'd like to focus on Luke for the purposes of today's discussion. Our passage is taken from the book's 19th chapter, verses 28-40. Hear these words:

The Triumphal Entry

²⁸ And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ 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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their

cloaks on the road. ³⁷ 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, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

Jesus, a devout Jew, is honoring the tradition of coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But Jesus is coming to Jerusalem a king. Luke affirms this by recounting Jesus’ telling of what is known as the Parable of The Ten Minas. Jesus did his best teaching by way of parables, and this lesson is his forecast of what His kingdom will look like. It will not look like the thousands who have shown up to witness His arrival anticipate, despite the fact that he comes in on a donkey, a gesture they would have recognized from the writings of the prophet Zechariah who said, in the ninth verse of the ninth chapter of the book named for him:

**Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey**

So, Jesus is coming to town a king, and the people are cheering because they see in Him the messiah who will rescue them from the oppression of Rome, under whose thumb they’ve been for as long as they can recall. He’s coming in humble but He is their hero, and heroes deserve a parade.

The McKinley parade is so funny and tender and sweet. I’ve watched it dozens of times and it still charms me so. When I saw the flyover parade of the B-2 I was just in awe of the might and sheer power and force of the sight. I still am. I want you to consider the best parade you’ve ever seen: a Presidential inauguration, Macy’s or the Rose Bowl parades, or a local Christmas celebration. Then I’d like you to consider being in the company of someone who, at least figuratively, spits on the parade, calls it a waste of time, tells the cheering masses to shut up. If you can imagine such a scouring soul then you’ve painted a pretty good portrait of a group called the Pharisees, an assembly of priests who were given authority to rule religiously over the people of Israel. Several weeks ago you may recall that Pastor Ron spoke of the half-truth “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it”. The Pharisees would have been the guys wearing the t-shirts. The Pharisees were the guys to rain on this most remarkable of parades. The Pharisees were the guys telling Jesus to tell His cheering masses to shut up. In response, Jesus tells the Pharisees that if human voices are stilled the mineral voices would declare His name as King

Now, it might be argued, within a historical context, what the Pharisees called for made social, political, and cultural sense. The Pharisees saw themselves as the moral compass of Israel, and they saw Israel as the driving force of God’s plan to save the Earth. They believed that their priesthood and the temple in which that priesthood was housed was central to that whole mission. Without them, there was no way to deal with sin, there was no way to understand God’s presence on Earth, no chance for hope or holiness on Earth.

Into this mix marches this parade, whose main attraction, no, only attraction, is a young, cocky, carpenter slash rabbi who shows up with a hero-worshipping mob. He has the gall to walk into the Pharisee's place of business, the temple, like he owns the joint. I invite you to read further in Luke's gospel; it's all chronicled right there. He acts with ultimate authority: He forgives sins! He calls God his father. He works on Sundays!

He exercises powers that flaunt the laws that the Pharisees have fostered, God's laws that will hold Israel together. He breaks those laws! He blasphemes (speaks irreverently) about God. Worse still, he could very well be the spark that causes further heresy and disregard of the rules they, the Pharisees, have been ordained to uphold.

He sides with women, tax collectors, society's marginalized, giving them crazy and outlandish ideas about kingdoms and eternity and what God *really* desires for them.

If this keeps up, God's going to throw Israel right back into exile again, and then the Romans will ride in and destroy the temple...again. He, and they, have done it before for such waywardness. A Broadway musical, first performed in 1970, called "Jesus Christ Superstar" features a tune called "Hosanna", where a cast member, portraying a high priest named Caiaphas, sings:

"Tell the rabble to be quiet, we anticipate a riot.
This common crowd, is much too loud.
Tell the mob who sing your song that they are fools and they are wrong.
They are a curse. They should disperse."

So, Jesus had to be taken out. For the good of Israel, for the good of the world, Jesus must be condemned. And let's face it: The Pharisees did not do anything the best and the brightest of our courts wouldn't do. The Pharisees did not do anything our churches haven't done. They saw Jesus as a serious threat to order and righteousness. For the Pharisees it was the only, dare I say, "devout" thing left to do. So they looked upon His triumphal entry and plotted his tragic execution.

Why? Pastor Ron has spoken these last weeks about six of the seven deadly sins: wrath, greed, sloth, lust, envy, and gluttony. I would argue that the seventh deadly sin, pride, is at the heart of the Pharisees' scorn for Jesus.

Ron described the deadly sins as the foundation of all other sins. I'd like to push the envelope a little further on that declaration by suggesting that the sin of pride is the foundation of all the deadly sins. It's the mother of all sins, no disrespect to mothers intended. It is the sin of all sins. Pride is the sin, Scripture tells us, that transformed Lucifer, an anointed, appointed servant of God, from, to quote Ezekiel, "the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty," into the Devil. The sin of pride first led Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in her pursuit to be "like God".

Augustine wrote the "Pride is the commencement of all sins" because it was this which overthrew the devil, from whom arose the origin of sin. The sin of pride, I'll say it again, is the foremost among the seven deadly sins. It is the sin of pride that declared to the Pharisees "It's either gonna' be Jesus or it's gonna' be us". It is the sin of pride that led the ones who shouted "Hosanna" at the sight of the oncoming parade and its guest of honor on Sunday, to call for his execution on Thursday. Their pride led to His fall.

But that's 2000 years ago, in Biblical times. This is church here and now. We're followers of Jesus. Hey, I'm a pastor. I, we, would never say "It's either gonna' be Jesus or it's gonna' be me." Well folks, I've just told a mountainous lie. Sadly, I say it just about every day, and sadly, Jesus loses. He loses to my wrath, my greed, my sloth, my lust, my envy, my greed.

But it doesn't have to be that way. My sadness at realizing the tension in my soul wherein I shout "Hosanna" in one breath and "crucify Him" in the next, is ultimately overcome by His grace, a grace that compelled him to jettison hubris in pursuit of ultimate humility, even to the point of death on the cross, a grace that propelled Him up from the literal grave, and propels me up from the bondage of a spiritual one. Grace. Grace. It's either gonna' be grace or it's gonna' be pride. It's either gonna' be Jesus or it's gonna' be me! I choose grace. I choose Jesus. Do you?

Corrie Ten Boom, a rescuer of Jews in Nazi Germany who was imprisoned for her efforts, went on to be a noted author and evangelist. Someone once asked her what it was like to receive all the adulation that she did, all the applause, all the, dare I say, hosannas. Corrie looked at her interviewer and asked her to recall the very passage from Luke that we have discussed this morning. "Tell me", said Corrie, "do you think when Our Lord was carried into Jerusalem that day, that the donkey ever once thought the applause was for him?"

Pride is interested in the applause; grace is interested in carrying forth Jesus, of, dare I say, being the donkey. May we be the donkey today, the humble colt, carrying the good news of acceptance, forgiveness, peace, and a love that surpasses all understanding, to a world too often too wrapped up in itself to see that promise and goodness, righteousness and holiness, are indeed possible. I'm gonna' be the donkey today. Anybody wanna' join me?

Let us pray.