

Sermon for Pam Sunday 2020

Luke 18:28-40

Pastor Stephen Reynolds "A Time for Joy"

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



The city of Seattle is a gloomy place. Seattle receives precipitation 150 days a year, and only has about 70 days of mostly sunny or sunny days. It is known as one of the more depressing places to live in the continental United States because of the lack of sunshine.

Two summers ago, our family was able to head to Seattle to celebrate my sister's marriage, and we decided to make a week of it. After the wedding festivities, we booked a place in Seattle and were simply tourists, there to experience the amazing sights, sounds and tastes that Seattle had to offer.



One morning, we headed into downtown to visit perhaps the most famous landmark- the Space Needle. It was a bright, sunny day- one of those rare days in Seattle. As we drove into town, there was one large white cloud off in the distance on an otherwise beautiful day. After parking, paying for our



tickets and taking the elevator to the top of the Space Needle, I realized that this large white cloud was no cloud at all- It was actually Mt. Rainier. The sight was breathtaking- A majestic 14,000 foot peak that was almost 60 miles away as the crow flies was visible- for an hour or so. Soon the

clouds came, along with the rain showers, and this large beautiful mountain disappeared back into the gloom. The locals told us to treasure the views we got, because they don't come around all that often.

Palm Sunday, and our Gospel reading, often gets made, into a nice moment or a fleeting view of something greater, which it is, at least in some ways. Palm Sunday is as things ought to be, in one sense- the crowds recognize Jesus for who He is, the disciples fall down in worship, and there is joy in the air. But this glimpse of how things should be is quickly stolen by the Pharisees. "Teacher," they say, "Rebuke your disciples." Jealousy has consumed them, and the Pharisees lash out at Jesus, ruining what was a perfect moment to seek their own glory and how they think things should be. The beautiful glimpse of God's kingdom in action is replaced by jealous humans lashing out. The gloomy clouds have returned. The joy of Jesus entering into his kingdom to take his rightful throne will be stolen away by those who will seek to only preserve their power, prestige and fiefdom. That's the thing with moments, isn't it? There here, and then they are gone, so easily spoiled by the next piece of bad news, by the next complaint or the next fleeting need we think we have.



I have no doubt that there are moments that many of you are missing, whether it be worshipping together, spending time with family and friends, eating out or perhaps just having a normal routine of going to work. I think we all are hoping for some glimpse, some assurance that we will be able to get back to our normal

routines, our normal patterns of life and do so quickly. Certainly many of us have struggled to find joy in this new time we have entered, as our lives, our connections and our families have been disrupted. We are hoping for a glimmer of hope, a glimpse that our current predicament will be lifted.

But Jesus does not revel in the brief moment of Palm Sunday, nor does he avoid the lows and struggles and fear and suffering that will come. Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm



Sunday knowing what lies before him, a rollercoaster of a last meal, betrayal, arrest, a sham trial, being beaten, scourged and crucified. Jesus does not look back to the fleeting glimpses of the past, but instead seeks to bring that kingdom, that moment, in its fullest. He knows the price to be paid. He knows what is at stake, and so enters Jerusalem, yes, in a moment of Joy, but heading to the cross so that our joy may be complete. Palm Sunday is not an event that is meant to give us one more glimpse of something that feels good. Rather, Palm Sunday is meant to give us great joy because we see our God taking the next stop in His ultimate mission-to conquer sin, death and the gloom and clouds of this world.



I'm betting that many of us are really yearning for some joy this week, but I also suspect that some of you found some joy in unexpected places this week. If you'd like, while you have this opportunity, take a moment and share what has brought you unexpected joy this week in the midst of the current pandemic. You can even hit the 'pause' button if you'd like, to discuss this with your families.

Think of those moments, as good as they are- We are thankful for them, and they are gifts from God. And yet, if those moments are all we have, there is no ultimate joy. We are not even able to eat, drink and be merry because of the effects of sin in this world. This pandemic has exposed just how frail we are physically and spiritually. I'm betting some of your earthly joys have been stripped away from you in the last couple of weeks, and that you have been left restless, frustrated, angry, and perhaps even bored. All of these point to a spiritual state that is less than what God calls us to have-we have found our identity, security, meaning and even joy ultimately not in God and his promises but in the things that have now been taken away. The temptation in times like these is to flail about, looking for some temporary relief, perhaps in and



through nostalgia and hearkening back to things that were better, or perhaps through whatever takes our mind off our predicament for a period of time, however small that period of time may be.

Our God, though, is not a God of half measures or fleeting glimpses of His promises. He is not a God who stands far off and says “you’ll get through it if you are strong enough” or a God who says “It could be worse.” No, Jesus enters into the thick of it and, immediately on Palm Sunday, meets the gloom and clouds of sin that envelopes this whole world head. You’ll find Jesus teaching in the temple, speaking directly to those who hold his people in tyranny and proclaiming the coming kingdom. These actions will lead him directly to being crucified. He meets the doom and gloom of sin head on and in doing so gives us the clearest demonstration of who He is.

Our joy that we have in Christ is not because of some nice moments or fleeting glimpses we get amidst an otherwise depressed, angry and sin torn world. Our Joy is found in Christ because he has taken sin and sickness



and pain into himself, and because Jesus has given us the clearest demonstration of who He is as He was crucified. Knowing and believing this good news then, brothers and sisters, I would remind you that even in this time of pandemic it is a time for joy. This joy comes not from a string of happy moments or even from

emotions, but rather having a sure and certain confidence that, because Christ entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and accomplished everything he set out to do, everything will work out as the Lord wills it. This gives us a profound joy, one not rooted in vapid emotions or even fleeting moments, but instead rooted in Christ and His promises. Dear friends, as Christ came to accomplish his task on Palm Sunday, it was a time for joy, not just as a fleeting moment but as one more step of God’s plan for us being accomplished. Dear friends, as we languish under this pandemic, it is still a time for joy as we are anchored in God’s promises despite what may be temporary in front of us. In Jesus’s Name, Amen.