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Luke 19:35-38, 22:24-27 – Five Days Before the Crucifixion**

This Lenten season, we have been journeying through the Gospel of Luke, looking at how, in Luke’s gospel, Jesus reached out to the outsider, the outcast, and the outlaw inviting them back in and offering them a renewed relationship with God.

When Lent began four or so weeks ago, I invited you to take some time this season to read through Luke’s Gospel, even if you had done so at the beginning of the year during Advent. Each gospel writer has a story to tell, and Luke’s is that Jesus *the Christ* is the Messiah, the Son of God...the one who came to restore us in right relationship with God. And we see that all throughout his gospel as Luke tells this story of Jesus reaching out, over and over and over again to the lowly, the marginalized, the outsider, the outcast and the outlaw, and gently and lovingly pulling them back in.

Last week, Jesus went to the house of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus, a very sinful man. He was a man with great authority. He was a man who was used to telling people to set up meetings and make things happen and they did. Yet, when he heard that Jesus as coming to town, he didn’t tell his people to set that up. Instead, he found himself hiding up in a tree hoping to just get a glimpse of this man who shared God’s love with people like him. He was hoping to get a glimpse of him...hoping he wouldn’t be seen...hoping to be invisible. Ever want to be invisible? ***But he wasn’t invisible. God saw him and Jesus saw him. “I’m going to your house today, Zacchaeus. I see you.”* Jesus saw the outsiders, the outcasts and the outlaws and restored them to community...to right relationship with God.** On the spot, Zacchaeus gave half of his wealth away and vowed to repay all he had cheated...which as probably a lot.

Today, we continue our journey to that empty tomb by looking at how Jesus reached out to those outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws in his final days starting with his entry into Jerusalem. I realize that next week is Palm Sunday and that’s what we usually talk about on Palm Sunday. We’ve got something else to cover next week.....and it’s going to be alright if we jump ahead a little bit. Let us pray.

**Sermon:** Over the past several weeks, we have been journeying with Jesus toward Jerusalem, and we’ve been meeting some of the folks he met along the way. Our passage for today bookends this five-day period. It begins with Jesus’ entry into the city and ends with a moment at the Last Supper when the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest. That’s how I always know that there is hope for me. These disciples had been with him for three years and here they are in the 11th hour and they still didn’t get it. They still didn’t understand what this was all about...what Jesus was all about. Yet, Jesus loves them anyways and uses them to create the church.

In this five-day period, a lot happened. In Luke’s Gospel, the actual travel narrative, this journey towards the cross, began in Luke 9:51...*“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* He’s a man with a purpose. He knows where he’s going. He’s headed to Jerusalem knowing there are a bunch of angry Pharisees waiting for him there.

Jesus had already upset the apple cart per se. He ate with sinners, healed folks on the Sabbath, called out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders...he had not made friends in high places. So, when he decided that he was going to go to Jerusalem for the Passover, he already knew how that was going to end...but he goes anyways.

This whole journey from Galilee where he set out for Jerusalem in Luke 9 to the city of Jerusalem itself was about 80 miles in length...or about 4 days of walking. They would walk about 20 miles a day. I’m not going to say for certain...maybe there was a extra day or two of ministry thrown in there, but the point is...there wasn’t a lot of time between Jesus deciding to travel to Jerusalem and the actual crucifixion. Maybe two weeks. Most of Luke’s gospel is dedicated to this journey.

After leaving Zacchaeus’ house in Jericho, Jesus traveled to the Mount of Olives outside of Bethany. It was about 13 miles from Jericho...2 miles from Jerusalem. This is where he sends two of his disciples into the village to get the donkey, telling them, *“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there’”*...bring him to me. They did just as Jesus asked them to, and we are told that they put a cloak over the donkey and put Jesus on it, and Jesus rode it down the road from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem.

This is significant. In the ancient Middle East, leaders (particularly Roman leaders) rode horses especially if they were riding into war or riding into town in a time of war. Horses symbolized power and strength, things that the world valued. The world wanted powerful, strong leaders in charge. That hasn’t changed, has it? We value powerful leaders and symbols of power.

On the other hand, a donkey was a symbol of humility and peace and was used a lot in the Jewish tradition. Jesus was making a point. As he rode into town at a time when the Jews were still seeking a military leader, Jesus was saying “I am the Messiah. I am the Son of God, and I come to bring peace...not war.” As he entered Jerusalem, Jesus was well aware of the fact that the people were looking and praying for the one God was going to send who would rise up to defeat their Roman oppressors, and Jesus was saying “I’m the One God sent...but not to take you into war, but to help you find peace.”

As this was happening, the people might have thought about the prophet Zechariah and what he wrote:

 *Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!
 Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious,
 Yet he is humble, riding on a donkey riding on a donkey’s colt.*

*I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.*

Maybe this is what Jesus was thinking when he sent his disciples into town or when he was riding that donkey down that road toward Jerusalem. In Luke 19:41, we read: *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, we wept over it.”*  Riding down that hill from the Mount of Olives, he would have been able to see the Temple and the city sprawled out before him, and we are told that he cried. His heart was breaking for these people, people who were rejoicing now and laying down palms and their cloaks but he knew that wouldn’t last. He knew that the message of peace he brought wasn’t a message people wanted to hear.

**We’ve been looking at Luke’s gospel through the eyes of the outsider, outcast, and outlaw and there are a lot in this story leading up to the crucifixion.** Maybe that’s why Jesus wept. He could see those the rest of the world couldn’t. He could see how power and money corrupted, how the poor were taken advantage of while the rich were lifted up. He could see the destruction that was coming because they chose war over peace. By the time Luke writes these words, the Temple had been destroyed. **Jesus wept as he entered this city.**

**He wept...**We’re told that right after Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went to the Temple and was greeted by the money changers and those selling sacrificial animals. In ancient Judaism, there were three pilgrimage festivals where people would travel to Jerusalem, Passover being one of them. During those festivals, thousands of Jews came to offer sacrifices and pay their temple tax. The temple tax was a half-shekel, but couldn’t be paid with foreign coins because they included the likeness of a pagan emperor on them. It was unacceptable. So, the coins needed to be exchanged for Jewish currency. And when it came to the sacrifice, if you’re traveling a long distance, it’s a challenge to bring an animal along. Why not pick one up in town?

The problem was that they were charging exuberant rates for this service. They were taking advantage of people for an excessive profit. Instead of providing these services as a business in another part of the city, they exploited the religious zeal of their visitors and did it on the temple grounds. I imagine it’s like the difference between purchasing a coke at a baseball game inside of Comerica Park or at the gas station on the way there. Huge difference...right?

**Jesus lifted up the lowly.** We see that all throughout Luke’s gospel and the poor were part of the lowly. We saw that in Mary. Jesus walked into the temple and this was what he saw...people being exploited and the religious leaders allowing it to happen...the religious leaders profiting off of this.

**Seek justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God.** That’s the work of the church. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement believed that. Justice was an important part of our work as followers of Christ because that was what Jesus did...he sought justice in the world as he reached out to the outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws. That’s what we’re called to do too.

We live in a world where it’s expensive to be poor. Prior to entering ministry, on two occasions, I worked in the insurance industry. The first time, (which was in 95-99), if you called and wanted liability only on a car, I could tell you exactly how much it was going to cost based on your driving record, where you lived, and if you had another car. When I went back 10 years later in 2005, all that changed. I quickly discovered that the poor and marginalized were paying far greater rates than their middle-class counterparts because things like credit scores, fictional numbers based on how many credit cards you have and whether or not you own a house, became part of the rating process. The difference in premium was huge...don’t get me started on homeowners’ insurance. Marginalized people being taken advantage of.

When Jesus walked into that temple, he saw the people who were suffering because they had been taken advantage of by this system designed to exploit them. He got angry. I like that too. It’s okay to get angry now and again...righteous anger is good. It leads to action. **How are we helping? How are we seeking justice for our poor or marginalized neighbor?**

**Who in our communities need to be lifted up? Who in our communities need our righteous anger?** I believe that it’s okay for us to have righteous anger. Last week, Mary Ellen and I went to Lansing with about 350 other UMC members. I was there because I’m angry. I’m angry that our children are have to go through active shooter drills. I’m angry that the love for guns has effectively shut down any conversation around finding a real solution to the problem that going to the grocery store is a risk anymore. I’m angry. I don’t want to take away everyone’s guns and I don’t know anyone who does. I don’t want to worry about whether or not my grandkids will survive the day at school either.

**In these five days, there were several outsiders, outcast, and outlaws Jesus came in contact with.** I hope you take a moment to read through these passages. Read about how Jesus reached out to them and lifted them up...how Jesus sought justice for them.

Today’s passage ends with the disciples sitting around the table arguing over who’s most important. Who is the greatest among us? Jesus reminded them that wasn’t what was important. Instead, Jesus said to them, *“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.*”

**Seek Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly With God...**and when we do that, we are about the work of reaching out to the outsiders, the outcasts, and the even the outlaws...we’re going to talk about them next week.

My question for you to ponder this week...how are you doing that? How are you about that work? How are you following the example of Christ in the world...reaching out to outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws and inviting them back in? Let us pray.