

The Fool's Parade?

Text: Luke 19:28-40

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This year I noticed something. Palm Sunday fell on April Fool's Day. I did some reading on the history of April Fool's Day.

One explanation is that some people, when the Gregorian Calendar replaced the Julian calendar in 1582, some people refused to make the switch and still celebrated their New Year's on April 1st. They became subjects of derision or fools. Great explanation but most scholars have rebuked it.

Some have said that it was an annual observance by the Emperor Constantine joking with the court jesters to see if these fools were smarter than he. Again, refuted by scholars. So I stand before you not really knowing where this day comes from.

So I stand before you having no insight on April Fool's Day.

Instead we have a story of Jesus coming into Jerusalem in triumph. We all know the story; Jesus rode a donkey into the city and people waved palms welcoming him and celebrating him as the Messiah. It was a great day in the life of Jesus. Maybe. Or some would say it was a fool's parade.

Some would see Jesus to have been a fool. Luke tells us over and over again in his Gospel that Jesus knew that he would face death in Jerusalem. They would wonder what kind of fool would intentionally go into a city where he knew he was going to be killed.

The fool's parade, they might call it.

The thing is, it makes you wonder who the real fools were.

Modern day parades are fun events. People have balloons, eat popcorn, and watch marching bands, groups in the community, and fire trucks go by. Parades are a lot of fun.

The Gospels speak to us of Jesus' entrance into the city of Jerusalem.

And there is a parade.

It's not really a great parade. Jesus is riding a young colt--a donkey into the city. A few people have thrown their cloaks down in front of him and people are waving palms singing their praises to Jesus. The Son of God entered the city and there was a small, but warm parade, with an adoring crowd praising him.

It seems like a simple event yet there is a great deal behind it.

The colt, for example from an unnamed person.

The colt referred to is not a horse, but a young donkey. Jesus rode into town on a young donkey not as the messiah of the powerful, but of the quiet, anonymous people of this world.

A conquering hero would have ridden a horse. A person coming in total peace would have ridden a donkey. Jesus demonstrated that he came in peace.

Also, the donkey was never ridden before. Jesus rides into town on an unbroken animal. An unbroken animal would have ordinarily kicked and bucked trying to get Jesus off of him. But we recognize that Jesus' power was over all the world including the creatures of the world.

And the people sing his praises and everyone goes home on that first Palm Sunday decreeing it a good day.

Yet, there are problems with Palm Sunday.

The very same crowd who yelled out, *Hosanna in the highest* on Sunday would, on Friday, shout out *crucify him!!!*

What happened?

What happened is, in many ways, a tragic tale, a tale of fools.

Lots of people overlook the horror and the tragedy of this story by simply saying "It was God's will," and turning their eyes away from the human evil that takes place.

What makes this story so unique and tragic is that, in many ways, Jesus died for not being what the people expected him to be.

There were two general thoughts on what the Messiah would be like. Sort of the liberal position and the conservative position. One would presume that one of the two would be correct. After all, they were both Scriptural and were easy to preach. Everyone believed that one or the other had to be true.

The first position was that the Messiah was going to be the new Moses and lead the people out of Roman occupation to a new Promised Land.

The second position was that the Messiah was going to be the new King David and conquer the Romans and create a new, ultra powerful kingdom.

Two great positions. They had only one flaw. They were both wrong.

To really understand who Jesus perceived himself to be, we read Isaiah 53. This passage is one

of the four passages in *Isaiah* called the *Songs of the Suffering Servant*.

Lots of people read the prophets and miss this passage. Yet, Isaiah very plainly paints a picture of Jesus--the one who suffered and died for us.

Jesus defined what it meant to be the Messiah. Not the thoughts of the people. Jesus defined what it meant. What people presumed it meant was of no consequence to him.

Isaiah includes a line worth remembering:

*By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my
people.* Isaiah 53:8

By a perversion of justice.

The people of Jesus' day and age did not want someone to come and die for them. They wanted someone to come and kill for them. They didn't want to be freed from sin and death; they wanted to be freed from the Romans.

Jesus, when he did not deny that he was the Messiah and the Son of God, sealed his own fate.

Ironically, Jesus did not seal his own fate by **his** definition of what the Messiah was, but by the definitions most people had.

There are lessons to Palm Sunday.

The first lesson is a lesson about the danger of arrogance.

The most popular movie some years ago was about a ship that sank for many reasons, not the least of which is the arrogance of the age. A crucial part of the tragedy of the Titanic was the arrogance of people in believing it was unsinkable and invincible.

Several years ago a space shuttle blew up because the people behind it believed that weather would have no impact on them.

Over the years many great errors and tragedies in history have taken place because of human arrogance.

Perhaps the largest misjudgment in the history of the human race was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

There was a tremendous amount of arrogance on the part of many people which led to this.

One could say that the Sanhedrin, the leaders of Israel, did not really know that Jesus was the Messiah.

Perhaps.

There was a great deal of evidence to suggest that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah.

One cannot look at the miracles of Jesus and completely dismiss who and what he was.

Jesus healed people afflicted with leprosy. They were covered with the disease and then instantly healed.

Lame people who had never walked and had shriveled legs, suddenly stood up and walked.

People who had never seen were suddenly made to see.

People who had never heard, could suddenly hear.

And, of course, the dead came back to life. No one in the history of the human race had ever opened a grave and brought a person back to life after their burial.

Jesus' miracles had to give people a clue that he was who he was. There was plenty of evidence for people to come to this conclusion.

Yet, they dismissed Jesus because he did not live up to the expectations they had of the Messiah. They believed in their own judgment over the judgment of God.

Jesus died because of arrogance.

He also died because he made people afraid.

The Romans were afraid of Jesus because they believed that he offered a rival to Caesar.

Yet, Jesus came into town on a donkey.

When asked about taxes Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and render unto God what is God's." In short, pay your taxes.

When a centurion came asking Jesus for help, Jesus helped him.

Jesus gave the Romans nothing to fear, yet they were afraid of him.

So too the members of the Sanhedrin.

If they had ever taken the time to really listen to Jesus, Jesus was not trying to destroy the Jewish faith--he was trying to renew it and revitalize it. Jesus, instead of leading people away from God or towards a false God, attempted to show people that God was close at hand.

And that God loved them.

And that they needed to love God.

And that God loved them.

And the Romans and the Sanhedrin were frightened of Jesus because he invited people to look at life and God in a different way.

And they were frightened of him.

And so the parade of Sunday turned into the nightmare of Friday.

So we still grapple with this parade thing.

This parade thing is a reminder to us, an ominous reminder of our human natures.

There are times something or someone good comes into our midst and we sing and dance for joy. We have a parade of some sort and celebrate and think life is wonderful and grand.

But arrogance and fear are strange bedfellows.

They can turn shouts of *All hail our glorious king* into *crucify him*.