



Sing

Luke 19:29-44

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Palm Sunday

“He was born in the summer of his twenty-seventh year, coming home to a place he’d never been before; he left yesterday behind him, you might say he was born again, you might say he found the key for every door...” So begins the singer/songwriter John Denver’s huge hit, “Rocky Mountain High.”

John Denver had had some success before that song came out, but he didn’t hit superstardom until he released “Rocky Mountain High” in 1973, a song – and an album – that told everyone what many already knew: Colorado was the place to be. He sang about his epiphany, his experience of the divine in nature; how the Rocky Mountains changed his life. John Denver’s music was, if not the beacon drawing young people – perhaps even some of you – to Colorado, it was their journey’s theme music. I loved the song, and I sure could relate: I, too, loved Colorado.

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coming home to a place he’d never been before...”

Denver’s singing about himself, his discovery that his spiritual roots weren’t back where he was born, but in a place he came upon – his spiritual home.

My brother, a geologist, moved to Denver in the mid-60’s after grad school. Mom, Dad, and I started coming out to visit him and his family in 1965; I was nine, and I had my own Colorado epiphany among the ghost mining towns, the twisty roads with thousand foot drop-offs, and the mountains: I knew that I was called to live in Colorado – long before John Denver told me. It was the Promised Land, I knew it; it was *home*.

Now, one of the great problems we mortals have with divine inspiration is the understanding the message we’re getting. I thought I was called to live in Colorado; it turns out I was only supposed to marry a lady who’d lived in Colorado – my wife, Valerie. Close enough.

But there are Palm Sunday parallels in this concept of being called by a place. Palm Sunday is about many things, but a very important one is *home*. “Coming home to a place he’d never been before...”

I expect that many of us have felt something similar to this idea; Valerie and I felt it very clearly when we first visited Green Valley, and I know that a substantial number of you that felt the same way when you first set foot in these parts. This is the home you never knew you had. The people, the climate, the music – the lack of snow and ice – it just somehow clicked, and you were drawn to the desert. The people who conceived our community certainly were – just read our local history.

We may find it hard to keep a place out of our minds, because we want to be there, because we believe we will be happy there... it will be what’s right for us. The Gospels tell us that Jesus was drawn to Jerusalem, too; but not for his own personal gratification. Jesus had been to the city before, of course; it’s not where he was born, his family’s home, but it is the home base of God’s chosen people, the people of Israel. It’s the location of his Father’s house, the Temple; it’s the center of the nation that his Father called out centuries before. It’s the place where his earthly ministry will end. It is his true home, the place where his life will find its center, its focus – its purpose. Jerusalem is calling him; calling him to complete himself.

Jerusalem’s pull on Jesus is one part of Palm Sunday. Another is how fickle human fame can be.

Before “RMH,” John Denver’s career had been rising; now it exploded. He was on all the talk shows – hosted the Tonight Show, in fact, was on all the concert shows; he even made movies. But like so many celebrities, he had a hard time handling everything that goes with becoming a public property. The spotlight of celebrity caught him, and soon he began to seek it out. He got involved in politics, struggled with addictions and depression, and as too often happens, his life ended early and tragically. While his song is now one of the two state songs of Colorado, his life, what he did and what he tried to do, is buried under the mountains of fame of the celebrities who have come since.

In contrast, Jesus seems never to have sought a public forum; the crowds sought him out. He often fought to avoid them. His self-understanding, his sense of identity, had nothing to do with their moods and opinions. He knew where he was going from the beginning, knew the end of the story before it began to be.

Last week John Dunham pointed out that Lent and Holy Week remind us whom we serve, reacquaint us with Jesus. Well, today here is Jesus, riding this colt, the crowds who surely expected him to change their lives shouting praise and adulation as he enters the city at the center of everything he comes from. Luke and Mark tell us people laid their cloaks on the road in front him; Matthew says tree branches; John gives us palm fronds spread in his path – and everybody shouts hooray!

That’s all sideshow, though. It’s part of the trappings that came with who he was, the Messiah. For generations, people had built elaborate expectations around who this promised King would be: even though the prophets downplayed this buzz, trying to

explain that the Messiah was to be a servant, one who would suffer, his reputation preceded Jesus by a long margin. The difference between this warrior-king the people had grown to expect and the ordinary man who had moved around Palestine teaching love and obedience to God was enough to make many decide that Jesus couldn't possibly be the Messiah. And his disciples couldn't seem to understand either, even though he'd been telling them the truth for a long time.

And so, once it came time for Jesus to come home to Jerusalem, the word got out that something big was happening. You wonder what was in the heads of those people cheering along the road. Who do *they* think he is? Are they thinking at all? Who started the cheering and why? The disciples joined in; what was in their heads?

Still, Jesus was the talk of Jerusalem that day. A mere mortal like John Denver can be on top of the world for a day, a week, a few years; invited to the White House, asked his opinion on environmental legislation, invited to sing in the USSR and Communist China, wined and dined and asked to sing for his supper.

While the spotlight of fame is on you, it's hungry – it wants more and more of you. When the spotlight moves on, as it surely must, all you have left is what you once were, only somehow less, because not only has celebrity claimed a bit of your soul, so many other people now have a piece of you, too. The spotlight moves to the next person, and the darkness creeps in. That's how it is with human fame.

Today, we have Jesus, the star of Palm Sunday, whose peak of fame lasted less than a week. From the top of the charts to having people shout for your death, that's a long road to travel in five days. Given human nature, and our oh-so-slippery affections, though, it was doable. And the darkness? Well, the beginning of the Gospel of John says it best: Jesus is the "true light," and "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Jesus' death was not an end, but the beginning – the dawning of a new chapter in God's history. And it all happened the way it was supposed to.

The truth is that Jesus was born for the spotlight. The key is that the spotlight wasn't *for* him: it *is* him. Oh, it shines bright, blinding, in fact; but all the attention it draws is not for him, it's for us. The light is not to show him off, but to show us the way to God. He shines that light on you and me, and lights up the path to follow home, to our true home, not some earthly house or geographic space, but home to the Kingdom of God, to where our ultimate citizenship belongs.

Just as Jesus was drawn home to Jerusalem, Christianity is drawn to Easter, the centerpiece of our faith, the believer's home. Make that trip home yourself this Holy Week, in prayer and in thought about what all this is about, as we are called home to a place we may not know as well as we think, but is where we are called to be: resurrection, salvation, in Jesus Christ.