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Honor and Glory – Luke 19:28-40

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the beginning of the end of his earthly ministry, is a sort of bookend for the transition between the "teacher/miracle worker Jesus" and the "maker of our salvation Christ," is a moment many of us hold dear from our earliest memories of church.

Two points, this morning: one – what was this really about – what does it say to us, thousands of years later? And, what about those who aren't here with us – for whom this day is just another day off? Both are related.

First, pull up the Palm Sunday scene in your mind – and then try to leave out whatever re-enactments you may have seen in movies or on TV. At least, in Luke's account, it probably wasn't like them. Jesus – and we – have entered the home stretch, the point where everything has moved from being possibilities to inevitability. There's no turning back now.

All four Gospels tell the story of Jesus' entry into the city, but Luke is different. And it's these differences that's important for us today. (Read lesson)

We've been watching some original Perry Mason shows lately. It's a real jolt seeing the difference in customs and attitudes – the assumptions people made about others, especially men about women and women about themselves – but there was one that demonstrated what this scene Luke paints for us might have been like: a client of Perry's, running for state senator, is trying to present himself as a great champion of progress, but using deliberately old-fashioned ways of campaigning. So, the candidate and a few of his aides watch from the windows of his headquarters as a brass band and cheering squad lead a procession through the town's streets – all twenty or thirty of them. At first, it looked like low-budget TV, but it looked a bit silly then, too, fifty-some years ago: one of the characters quips, "Wow, you've got a huge crowd out there with your brass band campaign!" He's being sarcastic; it was a very un-inspiring moment, and they all knew it.

Palm Sunday's great procession, with Jesus on a colt and a bunch of rag-tag followers shouting about his arrival, may have looked as unimpressive. Still, it's important to remember – the beginnings are small, but the end is world-changing. In a conversation the other day with someone who'd actually been to the Mount of Olives, to Jerusalem, it came up how unimposing this whole event must have been – at least,

as Luke tells it. Probably more people here in this room than in the crowd calling down praises on Jesus, using words of peace remarkably similar to the angel's chorus to the shepherds on the night of Jesus birth, back in chapter two of Luke – the whole event, really, a lot like Christmas, something small and totally unprepossessing, but of incredible importance. From a human point of view, it was all so much smaller and plainer than we want it to be, than we imagine.

Which is as it should be. While each of us and our concerns are terribly most important to us, in the great scheme of things, none of us is really that important: probably none of us will shake the world. But each of us is important to God.

But our concerns are real. We do have concerns, some of us even concerns about our faith and God. Can you erase God from your life? Or does God stick with you despite your best efforts to push him away? What about the difference between being raised in faith or discovering faith? Born Christian, or reborn into Christianity? What about all those who aren't here in this sanctuary – or any other? And while there are those who are secure in their answers to these questions for themselves, they may wonder about spouses, friends, family – especially today, when the long-accepted sign of faith, church membership or at least attendance, is simply dropping away.

People often ask if there's any difference between the denominations worth mentioning, and it so happens that here, at least, there is. Presbyterians theology has a bag of tools of its very own, one of which fits these questions, and which appears in this very passage: one of the ways we see God working in the world is something called "irresistible grace." Irresistible grace tells us that the saving grace of God applies to all God has determined to save, and in God's time, God overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of Christ.

In other words, God is in charge of his creation, and intends to follow through on his plan which precedes creation itself: the redemption of creation. The Bible tells this story from the very first verse to the last.

It's in Jesus words today – in that last verse. "If they were silent, even the rocks would cry out." Why? Because nothing that happened on that day – or this day – is beyond God's plan. If the human voices stopped their praises, well, then, God's creation would take up the chorus. We may think we push God away, but God stays with us.

Which, to many, is a comforting thought. God will do what God will do. The hard part is that it will be when God has planned to do it, not us.

All the seemingly inconsequential events really had and have a purpose: the salvation of creation, in particular, the salvation of

humanity from its mire of sin, from the grip of death. God uses all of his creation to further his agenda – our salvation.

So the events of this week are in a way like a microcosm of our life – from joy to suffering, from death to resurrection. And in some way we can't fully understand, it brings honor and glory to God.

Anne Lamott, a Christian writer of great skill and also a fine example of what it is to be human, posted a true story on her Facebook page that illustrates the mystery and separation of human and divine, of God's rule over all. She's on a tour promoting her latest book, and, showing up for a radio interview, couldn't find a parking spot, so, running out of time, went into a parking garage. She stuffed the ticket in her wallet and went off to do her interview. But when she got back in her car and opened her wallet, the ticket was gone. What? In her words:

“... It wasn't in my wallet. I looked, again and again, but couldn't find it, so I rifled through my purse. [It] wasn't there, either. I [dumped]my purse...on the passenger seat, and pawed through it...Sighing loudly, I looked everywhere it could have fallen--the console between the front seats, the ashtray, the floor, the glovebox. Then I got out, exasperated with myself. I am getting so spaced out. I don't want to be put in a home yet!

“After a minute, though, I remembered Rule One: radical self-care.

Militant and maternal kindness to one's own time-consuming and annoying self...I bent in, and examined every spot in the front seat. I sat in both seats so I could skootch them backwards, and then beneath. It was a CSI car exam. Then I did the back seats. I frisked myself again. Looked through my wallet, and then my whole purse, again.

“Finally, I decided to try and talk my way out past the guy in the exit booth... I...headed toward the exit, passing a small man in a garage uniform on foot. I rolled down my window, and said, ‘Can you help me? I've lost my ticket.’ He threw up his hands. ‘It's 38 dollars.’ I thought he was [playing with] me at first, so I beamed, since we were now co-conspirators in the game.

“‘I know--but can you help me? I've been here less than an hour.’

“‘He shook his head. ‘It's 38 dollars for a lost ticket. All lost tickets. 38 dollars.’

“‘I said I understand that, but I just really needed his help.

‘No one can help you,’ he said, like a voice from the crypt.

“‘I wanted to smack him. Then I spoke verrrrrry slowly, to help him grasp the nuances. ‘I've only been here fifty minutes. But I've lost my ticket, and I just need you to help me explain this.’

“‘He spoke verrrry slowly, too, to help me better understand:

‘No...one...can...help....you.’

“My entire childhood flashed before my eyes. I thought I might begin tearing at the flesh on my forehead.

“‘Okay,’ I said coldly and began rolling up my window.

“‘No one could even help my BOSS,’ he said. ‘My BOSS would have to pay 38 dollars.’

“I nodded. I felt crazy, victimized, misunderstood. I drove twenty feet, and then pulled over. I got out of the car. I frisked myself again, like Joe Friday. I bent in and examined the car, under the seats, the console, every ...square inch of the car. I got back in.

“Maybe twenty minutes had passed. And then I remembered something-
-that I believe in God, in divine assistance, for the frazzled and mentally [overloaded], like myself. So I hung my head, and prayed.

“I said, Look, God. I've got a problem. I've tried everything, but now I need you to step into this. Help me be okay with having to pay the 38 dollars; help me know that I need to do better next time, and keep better track of things. It would be great if we could somehow together find the ticket, but otherwise, help me not be [a jerk]. Help me be a good sport, and just pay.” (Notice: she’s praying for her attitude, not for a miracle – though those aren’t always too far apart.)

“After a minute, I started laughing quietly, sort of with and at myself simultaneously, gently. When I opened my eyes, there, on the floor of the passenger seat, was the little blue ticket.

"Oh... Dude," I said to God. "You are such a show-off."

"Then I drove to the exit booth, paid my five dollars, and drove up the ramp to the sunlight."

So, here's the thing: first, God is in control. It's God's world.

Second, it's not just the big, creation-sized things that get God's work done; it's the tiny, at-the-time-unnoticed, soon-forgotten, things; things that don't even seem like God at all, from the Old Testament heathen nations whom God used to teach his chosen people how to be what he created them to be, to Paul's great quote in Romans 8:28 – "All things work together for good, for those who are called according to God's purpose."

And in between is Palm or Passion Sunday, with its week of celebration and catastrophe to come. Like Christmas and its "Mary, Did You Know?" side, this week and our lives are mixtures of everything that can be.

But know this, know this for certain: God hold us, holds you in his unbounded love and care – and it will be all right in the end: for God has marshaled all of his creation to make that end glorious for us all – and that means you.