

Imagine with me that you have arrived in a big city by foot. It is 2000 years ago and you have come to celebrate. You have come to celebrate the Passover. That ritual held every year to remember and celebrate that historical event from your faith tradition when God led your ancestors out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

Upon entering the city you see two groups of people who are close in proximity to one another. You ask a bystander, "What are these two groups preparing to do?" "They are each going to a parade," you are told. "A parade?" you say to yourself. "I would like to watch a parade. Tell me, kind sir, about these parades which are about to occur."

The bystander then points to one of the two groups. "They are going to the parade in honor of Pontius Pilate. He is our governor. Pilate's parades are always quite a spectacle," the man says. "Pilate will come riding in on a big white stallion. A war horse. He will be surrounded by all of his military weaponry. It is always quite a show. You will get to see the latest in high tech military weapons."

"That parade should be some kind of parade," the man says. "All of the big government leaders will be there. The people who are the movers and the shakers will be there for that parade. So that group over there is going to the parade to honor Pontius Pilate. The big and strong and mighty parade to celebrate the ability to destroy anyone who opposes the mighty and powerful."

"That sounds like some kind of parade," you say to yourself. You then ask the man, "So tell me about the other parade that this other group is going to attend." "Oh, that parade?" the man says with a snark. "I am not sure what that parade will be like but just look at the types of people in the group going to that parade."

“I see Samaritans, I see blind people, I see lame people, I see women, I see lepers, I see children and youth. I see the downtrodden. I don’t know what kind of parade that parade is going to be but by looking at the people who are going I would not expect too much.”

You look at the first crowd. The one going to the military parade and you think to yourself, “It sounds like the script for that parade has already been written. I think I might be in for some adventure today. Let me check out what is happening in this second parade. The one that these lowly and quite ordinary people are planning to attend.”

You venture over to the back gate of the town. There you do see lots of people gathered. They are not dressed in clothes that impress but rather in rags worn by commoners. Many of them smell and many of them appear to be deformed in some way.

As you get closer to the back gate leading to the town you notice a donkey coming in. A donkey is quite a contrast to the big white stallion being ridden by Pontius Pilate on the other side of the town. As you look closer you notice this crowd of ordinary folks are taking off many of their overcoats and laying them purposefully on the donkey. It is as if they are too poor to put on a proper saddle so they are making one with what they have.

Out of the middle of the crowd you notice that there is one man that they seem to be setting apart from the others. He is a rather ordinary looking man. You can tell by the wear on his hands that he must be some type of carpenter or handyman. The crowd then lifts this man up and places him on the donkey. On the coats that they had placed on the donkey.

Another man starts to pull the donkey by his harness while others in the crowd begin to place their coats on the road in front of the donkey. Do these people not care that their precious clothes will be trampled on by the muddy hoofs of this beast of burden? It doesn't seem to stop them. They continue to throw their coats on the road and the carpenter man, now situated on the donkey, continues to ride.

"This is such a different celebration than the one on the other side of town," you think to yourself. The crowd then starts a chant. The chant is muddled at first but then it comes together. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

You recognize those words. They come from one of the Psalms. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

But then you notice some men who appear to be religious leaders begin to shout out over the crowd. "Jesus," they exclaim, "tell your followers to be quiet. Don't they know what they are doing? Don't they know what is happening on the other end of town? They are using one of our psalms which is used to celebrate a king and they are using it to celebrate you as a king."

"Don't you know what will happen to us if the Romans hear this crowd shouting out these words? They will wipe us out. They will literally crucify us. Please Jesus. Tell this crowd to be quiet. We can't make the Romans angry. They are stronger than us. They have big weapons."

But Jesus responds to the religious leaders called Pharisees. He tells them "That if the crowd keeps quiet then the stones will cry out." You recognize those words as well. They are from the old prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk was one who said that God's judgment would fall on the people who conquered God's people.

Two parades. Two parades occurring at the same time in Jerusalem. At both parades there are people who are celebrating.

At one parade people are celebrating the rich and the powerful and the mighty. At this parade they are celebrating the one who can solve their problems with weapons of might. At this parade they are celebrating victory through power.

Then there is the other parade. The parade with a carpenter man riding on a simple donkey. Rather than military might, this parade is a celebration of one who is humble and meek. At this parade the people assembled are the downtrodden, the blind, the mentally ill, the forgotten, the foreigner. There are no powerful weapons and intimidating animals displayed in this parade.

Two parades where we have a chance to celebrate.

So which parade are you going to attend?

What are you going to celebrate? AMEN.

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-Text: Luke 19:28-40

-Given: March 24, 2013 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

Prayer of Confession

Sustainer of the weary, we know how we sang for joy when Christ came into our lives, and how we have not followed him as he leads us on this journey. We have hidden our faces from the pain and suffering of our world. We have turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed. We trust in the slick promotion of the world, and not in your words that can transform our lives.

Forgive us, Steadfast God, and shine your face upon us. Help us to have the same mind as Christ, so we would know your promises; help us to have the same heart as Christ, so we might serve your children; help us to have the same Spirit as Christ, so we might go wherever you lead us.

Prayers of the People

Holy God, Architect of our grace: from your house we praise you.

Your love is never taken from us; your goodness is the constant in our lives.
We worship you.

Jesus Christ, Sorrow of our salvation:
you dared to listen to God instead of the cheers
of the crowd and the jeers of your enemies.
We walk with you.

Holy Spirit, Glory of God: you give us light
so we might see the One who comes; you open our ears,
so we might hear the whispers of hope;
you sustain the weary, so we might journey through this week.
We welcome you.