

## “The Path”

“Not the Finish Line”

Preaching Text: Luke 19:28-40

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

20 March 2016—Palm Sunday

Hear the day’s lesson:

28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out” (Luke 19:28-40).

My friend, Pastor Rob Fuquay, wrote in his blog last week something about the human perception of control:

As data returned from last year’s Voyager 2 mission to Uranus a NASA scientist briefed media on what they were learning. He pointed out that the planet was not as they thought. There were more moons surrounding Uranus than they realized, the surface of the planet was more sculpted, and there were more rings surrounding the planet. But one more surprising element is that the planet seems to wobble rather than rotating on an even axis like earth.

To this a reporter asked how the scientist explained such a weird phenomenon. The scientist asked, “Why do you call it weird? From what we are learning it’s possible that earth is the oddball, not the norm.”

That is so like us humans isn’t it—to assume that the rest of the universe operates like our

planet? But what if we are the odd ones?

This is what the prophets communicated when they spoke for God saying, “My ways are not your ways nor are my thoughts your thoughts.” This was certainly evident in the events of Holy Week. It starts with a triumphal entry into Jerusalem where Jesus seems to fully claim all the expectations of a heralded Messiah. “At last,” his followers must have felt, “he’s finally declaring himself. Now we can take over!”

But by the end of the week, triumph turned to despondency. The heralded king was arrested and facing crucifixion like a criminal. Some king.

Yet, God’s power is revealed through the cross. God’s force and ability to conquer people would be shown in grace and sacrificial love. God doesn’t just want to conquer people—God wants to keep people. It probably seems like a wobbly way to go about it to us, but maybe our way in this world isn’t always as smooth and even as we think. We can impose our will, or embrace God’s.

For many people control is the watchword. I have never heard anyone say “you are out of control” and mean it in a complimentary way. People who do “self-talk” may at times somehow say under their breath: “I have got to get myself under control.” If we are honest we acknowledge that we want to control everything: how our spouses respond to us, what our children will achieve, and even who they date and perhaps even eventually marry. We would like to control the economy, the weather, the outcome of this coming Ranger’s season, and even when we will die. When you get right down to it, we simply feel a whole lot better and safer about everything when we are in charge. Not that we think we can be, but given the choice we would jump all over that opportunity.

No doubt this is possibly the thinking of the Pharisees when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey or “a colt.” Perhaps they sensed immediately that something was happening which might very well get out of control. Sometimes we categorize “the Pharisees” as the bad guys in the Gospels, but really they were the ones who protected the *status quo* of Judaism from too much deviation—too much change. The Pharisees were the ones who put the

kibosh on abnormality.

- crazy riff-raff waving branches and throwing their cloaks around
- singing wildly the praises of some itinerant preacher
- a preacher by the way who condemned self-righteousness, making them all nervous
- what if the preacher on a colt developed a following?
- what would the Romans do to all of these Jews then?
- what would happen if living by the rules was not simply enough?

So these Pharisees—the ones who wanted to keep things under control and in good order, told Jesus: “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” This means—“You had better get this unruly, ungodly mob back in line.” In other words, get them under control.

Jesus replied, in effect: “What they are doing is so true, so alive, so dynamic, so irrepressible, that if someone were to silence them, they very stones would cry out in praise and wonder of God!” And later you know how the story ends up—the one we will tell this Holy Week—the story ends with Jesus’ death and apparent defeat. A group of un-indicted co-conspirators kill Jesus—just in case there was some doubt about as to who was in charge—who was in control.

The authorities executed Jesus like a common criminal. That should have been the end of him, at least those who executed him had every reason to think it was the end. Yet 2000+ years later in every nation in the world there are people paying tribute to him—an itinerant preacher and teacher—a person who wrote no books, started no schools, and organized no revolutions.

As you all know the story—the tomb in which they laid him, and the stone used to seal that tomb, could not hold him. Whether or not that stone cried out with a hymn of praise as they rolled it away we cannot say. But we do know this—20+ centuries of famine and plague and war have not silenced his name. Opponents have persecuted and killed his followers, they have burned his churches; but the world’s greatest artists have built new buildings and written new songs. No power has been able to control this Jesus.

We still try to control him today, to explain Jesus in words and doctrines, to relate him to our cause, but in the end he defies every explanation and shatters every statement of faith.

And so, today we have a choice. We can continue to keep him locked up inside our explanations, setting ourselves up as authorities on what is proper and true—in which case we will probably suffocate our arid, arrogant, artificial rigidity—and people will decide we are not fit to be around in any event.

Or—we can give up our efforts to control everything including Jesus. We can throw ourselves into the scary-exciting freedom of living as human beings in a great big mysterious world where Jesus Christ is King. We can turn ourselves loose to rejoice in the wonder of his love, to share it with each other with the same abandon that caused the morning stars to sing together for joy on the first day of creation.

God and God's love are as personal as they are eternal, as eternal as they are personal. The closest we can come to an accurate description of Jesus' power and majesty and mercy is through poetry and dancing and song. Christ is King and all creation must sing. Hallelujah. Amen.