

AFTER THE PARADE

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Luke 19: 28 – 40

March 28, 2010

Palm Sunday

The parade is over. Here and there a discarded palm branch lies along the road. Those who laid cloaks before Jesus as a symbolic gesture of paving the way for him have picked these up, shaking off the dust.

The “Hosannas” people sang have given way to the sounds of the city. The donkey has been returned. The parade is over.

But in the shops and at the farmer’s market, and over tea, there is talk about it – the parade – and who he is – Jesus.

It’s quiet talk. Some speak almost in a whisper. The parade caused a commotion. Now there is a sense of foreboding.

Some say Jesus is the new David - the one who will become king and restore independence, power, wealth.

Other’s mock: “Some King, bouncing along on a donkey. He looked foolish if you ask me.”

Here and there someone ventures to say that Jesus is a Godsend – the messianic One filled with Holy Wisdom and Spirit.

Others respond that Jesus is just an eccentric, if not crazy, even dangerous.

After the parade throughout the city there is talk. And then someone asks, “What do you think will happen now?”

Of course, you and I know what happens. That on Friday after the parade, Jesus dies.

Well, he is killed really – executed. Grabbed in the night, Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin – the council of religious leaders, who accuse him of religious and political subversion.

There is no real evidence, but evidence isn’t the point. They just want to end this Jesus movement quickly.

So the Sanhedrin hands him over to the Roman Occupation Governor Pilate, with the recommendation that Jesus be executed.

Pilate actually gives Jesus the chance to defend himself, but Jesus won’t. Still, Pilate’s initial recommendation is that he can find nothing deserving a death sentence. But Jerusalem’s religious leaders are threatened by Jesus and Pilate finally relents and signs the order for crucifixion – hanging on a cross.

“Let’s just end this,” Pilate reasons. “These crazy Jewish messianic pretenders come and go. In a few weeks people will have forgotten about him. Okay, crucify him. End of story.”

So on Friday after the parade, Jesus carries the timber cross-piece to a place called Golgotha. There his hands are nailed to the timber and his body raised to hang until the life drains out of him.

It is no unique event. Often a road would be lined with dozens of crosses – a grizzly gauntlet of suffering and death. The unmistakable message of the Roman crosses is: “If you rock the boat; if you challenge the status quo...this will be your fate too.”

And Jesus had...rocked the boat. His parables and presence gave to the poor and the powerless a sense that their lives mattered. His teaching was about a different way God was bringing to be: a kingdom based on the spiritual virtues of mercy and healing love; a new realm more enduring and powerful even than Rome’s Empire.

It seemed too good to be true. It’s also the kind of talk that will get you killed. So after the palm parade those who asked, “What’s going to happen now?”...they really knew the answer to their own question. That Jerusalem’s elite would collaborate with the Romans to put an end to this Jesus thing.

And if there was any doubt, Jesus sealed his own fate. On the day after the parade he went to the Temple, where in a prophetic rage he overturned the tables of the sellers of animals for sacrifice.

“You cannot put a price on God’s mercy,” he screamed. “No one can buy God’s love. Grace is gift. Don’t you understand?”

And while the Temple vendors ran to the authorities, those who had come to purchase their salvation stood there stunned with their eyes as big as saucers.

No one had dared challenge the religious status quo like that. And what if Jesus was right? What if there was no price tag on God’s Holy Love? What if the prayers of those who could afford the big ticket sacrifices were no more important than those who could only offer their prayers?

Could it be that God wants justice and generosity lived more than shows of piety? Could it be true, that even small daily acts of healing and compassion matter more than grand demonstrations of belief?

If Jesus was right about all that...it would change everything – wouldn’t it?

And what Jesus did in the Temple is the talk of the city that evening. Behind closed doors, people ask: “Did you hear they had to shut down the Temple the rest of the afternoon? That must have taken a chunk out of revenue. I wish I had been there to see it - lambs running loose, doves flying away, Temple coins rolling around.”

“It must have been something to see. What do you think is going to happen now?”

Well, we know what happens....

At a meal, Jesus takes a towel and basin, kneels and washes the disciples’ feet.

At another meal, he predicts one of them will betray him and all will desert and deny even knowing him. They all say Jesus is wrong and swear their devotion.

Then Jesus takes bread and a cup, inviting them to eat and drink as a spiritual memorial to be shared with others. “What’s he talking about,” they whisper. “What’s going to happen now?”

We know that too. What happens is the betrayal, the agonizing night of prayer, the arrest, the disciples flee, Peter who swore he wouldn’t...does...deny even knowing Jesus.

Then on the Friday after the parade, Jesus is hung on a cross between two others also being executed as subversives.

Once raised on the cross, he utters those very human words: “My God...why?”

He says good-bye to his mother, who is there.

Someone reports that he prays a prayer of forgiveness for his accusers and crucifiers. Could that be? That he forgives those who are killing him? Could anyone really believe that God’s love is that large?

Then, mercifully it’s over. Jesus breathes his last. By one account, a Roman soldier runs a spear through his body just to make sure. By another account, a man named Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, who’d been afraid to speak in Jesus’ defense, now gains permission to put the body of Jesus in a tomb Joseph had purchased for himself. An act that no doubt cost Joseph his seat on the Sanhedrin.

It is sundown and the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath. That evening as people say their Sabbath prayers, not much is said about Jesus’ crucifixion. But in coming days, as people gather at the wells and marketplaces, they talk:

“Parading into the city like that was foolish of him – don’t you think?”

“Yeah, it’s one thing to stir people up in the hinterland of Galilee. But it’s another story when you come to Jerusalem and challenge the religious big boys.”

“I wonder why he didn’t flee the city after the Temple thing. He had to know that was a tipping point. Seems like he could have saved himself.”

“He had some things to say – didn’t he? But I knew he wouldn’t last long if he stayed in the city.”

“Yep, just a matter of time before he’d get the cross.”

“Well,” someone then says, “it was interesting while it lasted. But it was clear all along that nothing would really come of it.”