

*This Love is Humble©*

**John 12:12-19; Philippians 2:5-11**

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**Palm Sunday**

March 29, 2015

Year after year we do this. We come to this place in the Lenten Journey – a journey we started 40ish days ago with a willingness to have ashes put on our foreheads and hear the somber words spoken to us in the candlelight – “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Not everyone participated in that service. Some were out of town. Some had other commitments. Some just chose not to do it. And that’s okay. Jesus loves you just as much whether you had ashes on your face or not.

But, some of us just like the rituals that get us started on something that is kind of difficult to commit to and stay with for such a long time. Some of us made commitments to fast – to do without something during Lent. Some of us decided to add something like journaling or more prayer time. Some of us have come this far and stuck to it.

And some of us didn’t make it this far.

We do what we can do in our busy, crazy lives. I hope and pray that for each of you there has been some extra time where you have thought about the purpose of Lent and where you are in your faith journey; in your walk with God.

I hope that you have been open to the Holy Spirit showing you the places in your life where you might grow – or perhaps where you would want to turn away from something and go towards a stronger relationship with Christ.

That is the purpose of the Lenten Season. A time for reflection and sometimes repentance; a time for seeing more clearly how you can be a stronger disciple.

Lent is a time to evaluate your life and see just how the love of God through Jesus has changed things – perhaps the way you care for people; or maybe it’s how you live your life; maybe you are more compassionate, more forgiving because of the compassion and forgiveness you have experienced.

Maybe it is just little things you do like setting standards for yourself that look like the kind of standards you believe God calls you to.

Every year we do this. We come to Palm Sunday with a joyful anticipation. We have spent several weeks in a more somber kind of worship. We haven’t sung the alleluias

since Lent began. And, even though we won't sing alleluia today, we WILL sing Hosanna! which is kind of close to singing hallelujah. It is almost as joyous.

And we have a parade, after all! How could a parade be anything but happy?

I guess in a way, it's a little bit of a teaser because we start with joy and it's almost like we forget that we will go out into an even more somber week as we face Holy Week, as we come to Maundy Thursday, remembering Jesus' last supper, sharing together in that meal, and being reminded then of Jesus' arrest, knowing that Good Friday and the memory of the crucifixion - the darkest day ever – will be next.

Last Sunday we heard in the last part of the gospel reading from John that the Chief Priests had made up their minds, not only to arrest Jesus – but also to put Lazarus to death because of the miracle Jesus performed with Lazarus and how the people were wild about Jesus.

When I think about Lent and how difficult it is for us to make it through forty days of whatever we commit to, and then I think of Jesus, and what he faced, I have two emotions – one is that I feel somewhat ashamed of myself. I am disappointed that I can't stay focused and that the little thing I commit to for Lent is such a struggle.

My commitment for this time is so small, in comparison to what Jesus committed to for me ... which leads to the other emotion – a very humble gratitude for Jesus' commitment to face the pain and suffering he knew was coming.

And that pain and suffering would lead to a horrific death on a cross – one of the cruelest forms of execution there could possibly be.

And the people who were so wildly enthusiastic about Jesus just a few days before, and on that day when he rode into town on a lowly donkey – those same people quickly lost their loyalty for him.

Why would so many people go from waving palms and shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!" to shouting angrily "Crucify him!" just a few days later?

But, why wouldn't the people get angry at Jesus? They had witnessed powerful things happening when Jesus was around. The blind see; the lame walk; demons leave the one they have tormented; the winds calm; the masses are fed on a few loaves and fishes.

The dead rise. I mean, come on, if Jesus can do all those things, surely he could overthrow the Romans. Surely he had the power to lead them in a war that would change the way things were.

But he didn't. He remained humble and mostly silent. He allowed them to go through with the whipping, the mocking, the torment, the spitting, the thorns on his head.

He went to the cross and never resisted when they drove the nails into his hands. He just said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

This love is humble.

Listen to what Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, chapter two, beginning at verse five:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
 who, though he was in the form of God,  
   did not regard equality with God  
   as something to be exploited,  
 but emptied himself,  
   taking the form of a slave,  
   being born in human likeness.  
 And being found in human form,  
   he humbled himself  
   and became obedient to the point of death—  
   even death on a cross. (NRSV)

This love is humble.

And in this humble servant is a surprise. There *is* power in the humble Savior. He *will* rule. He *will* be King – not just King of Israel, or of the Jews, but of all who will put their trust in him.

Paul's letter continues, beginning at verse nine:

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
   and gave him the name  
   that is above every name,  
 so that at the name of Jesus  
   every knee should bend,  
   in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
 and every tongue should confess  
   that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
   to the glory of God the Father. (NRSV)

Hang on a little while longer. If the struggle of Lent seems to be too much, remember the passion of Christ – who in fact did not struggle at all, but gave himself completely for our sakes so that we might have forgiveness of sins, a relationship with God and new life – eternal life with him.

Easter means resurrection to those of us who believe that Christ was risen from the dead. The stone rolled away. The tomb empty.

But please, don't skip over the hard stuff of the coming days. The week we call Holy Week is dark and sad as we remember what our Lord went through.

But, it is in the reflecting and the remembering, and in understanding that it was Christ's passion for us that caused Him carry that cross up the hill to Calvary.

That is makes Easter Sunday – Resurrection Sunday – so very joyous and meaningful!

This love is humble. As our theme Scripture from 1 John 4 says: "This is love. Not that we have loved God but that he loved us."  
(1 John 4:10)

Even if you did nothing to observe Lent up until now, I want to invite you, and encourage you, to join the journey for this week. I feel certain that, if you do, you will discover great joy when we gather back here next Sunday.

Be of courage, my faithful brothers and sisters. Our Lord Jesus Christ walks with us into this week and beyond.

Thanks be to God!

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