

## WHAT WOULD BRING YOU PEACE Luke 19: 28 -44

Many years ago, the Swatridge family took a summer vacation road-trip to California, where we spent a day at Disneyland! It was a wonderful time – fun rides, great food, we met Goofy & Cinderella, and when it started to get dark, we lined up along Main Street for the Electric Parade! It wasn't like anything I'd ever seen. Music seemed to pour out of everywhere & each float was covered in LIGHT, miles of strings of multi-coloured lights that formed dresses & exotic trees & thrones & stairs. It was stunning! Finally, at the very end, we could a giant drum, 20 feet high, coming toward us, brightly lit and blaring a Disney theme song. As it got closer, we could see the lights made words on either side: "Happy Birthday Mickey". As it passed in front of us, my Dad turned to Mom and asked, genuinely confused, "Mickey who?"

How could he not know? How could he miss all the signs, the legions of tourists sporting black beanies with big round ear, the Mickey t-shirts, the Mickey balloons, the stores stuffed with Mickey paraphernalia.

Dad didn't recognize or even really see the Mouse in the tuxedo waving from a top the drum because he wasn't looking for him, and Mickey just wasn't important enough to Dad to be his first thought when he read the birthday greeting. We'll miss what we're not looking for; we overlook that which isn't important to us.

Just to be clear, today is not Palm Sunday, you did not sleep through Christmas, & if you're here for the first time, I promise we're not stuck in the past. Each week, our sermon text is determined by our published schedule for reading through the Bible in a year. On the schedule this week, Palm Sunday, and as one of our choir members says, "When in doubt, sing Hosanna!" So here we are, one of the greatest moments of human history, the public throngs about Jesus as He enters Jerusalem, aching to proclaim Him their King ... and He weeps.

What's going on here? It's the start of Passover week in Jerusalem & probably 1,000's of people are swarming Jesus as He rides into the city. They're waving branches, the traditional gesture to honour & praise a victorious leader, particularly after battle. They're singing & probably dancing & calling out blessings to the *King* who comes in the Name of the Lord. This frenzy of activity has brought chastisement from the ever-pious Pharisees & likely the unwanted attention of Roman authorities who maintain perfect order through fear. This is one of the reasons I love Jesus: He annoys all the right people.

He can't help it – anyone who seeks to *control* Him, or to contain faith, or who insists on understanding *why* Jesus does what He does for us, is going to be greatly annoyed at the unfathomable love and mystery of God!

Jesus has never before this moment received so much public attention & praise ... but He weeps. It seems He cries for the city of Jerusalem as He sees it before Him, knowing it will be destroyed by the Romans in 70A.D, a little more than 40 years from this moment. But I doubt it's that simple. Peace as the absence of war & destruction isn't usually the *kind of peace* that Jesus talks about.

Jerusalem is the authoritative & spiritual centre for God's chosen people, for the only culture in the ancient world that held a monotheistic faith. The Jewish people believed that Yahweh actually *lived* in the temple in Jerusalem, kept behind the curtain that concealed the Holy of Holies. They in effect believed that they *owned* God and therefore the temple in Jerusalem was where they boxed up the power & favour of God for safe keeping, all to themselves. Of course Jesus wept. It's Sunday – He'll be arrested Thursday & crucified on Friday. He's got 4 days on this earth to open their eyes, to make them recognize their Messiah & the things that make for peace → this is urgent, but all they see – all they *want* to see – is a conquering hero, a General they can force to be their King, delivered to them from God to vanquish the Romans. They can't conceive of God outside their sturdy stone box, even when He's right in front of them, *living* with them, *talking* with them, *touching* them. Jesus who?

In these few verses in Luke, Jesus twice says that they failed to recognize Him, and for this failure, they will forfeit peace. From our comfortable post-resurrection vantage point, we may be tempted to judge the crowd as foolish, or lacking faith, or not having a genuine relationship with God, or even being a bit dim. How could they miss the signs? How could they not recognize the Son of God?

“Unresting, unhasting and silent as light”, says the great old hymn. How often do we miss God's presence in our life because we're expecting God to show up with a pillar of fire or a plague of locusts? In verse 44, Jesus says they, “did not recognize the time of your visitation from God”. *Visitation* does not mean that Jesus was just popping by before leaving again. He used that word because in the original Greek language, it very specifically means, “God's presence among us”. Are you aware of God's *visits* to you every day? Do you *recognize* God in your daily life, or do you miss Him because He doesn't appear as you *want* Him to, created in *your* image? Are you missing the peace of knowing that God is here, and offers us true relationship?

When my nephew Brendan was a very young boy, 4 or 5 years old, he was certain of God's very real & tangible presence with him all day, every day. When his Dad, my brother, took the family

out for a special meal, he requested a table for four. Brendan gave his Dad's hand a tug and said, "We'll need five chairs, Dad, God's here". When he was getting ready to go into Grade 1, his Mom told him that she was going to miss having him at home during the day, and that she'd have to get used to being all alone. Brendan assured her, "Oh Mom, you're not alone – God's here". That's cute, isn't it, a little boy who's convinced that God is so real, He needs a chair at the dinner table. But that belief, that absolute certainty of God's constant presence was the basis for Brendan's young character – he was entirely fearless, and entirely at peace with the world.

Oh but Jane, that's the simplistic life of a little boy. How do I recognize God in the whirlwind that is the real, complicated, busy, stressful, even tragic, grown-up life? OK, fair question.

About 6 months into year one at Knox College, I came as close as I've ever come to refusing God's call. During a class discussion, out of nowhere & in response to nothing, one of the other ministerial candidates who shall remain nameless, went out of her way to make cutting, humiliating remarks very directly at me, loudly from across the room, in front of the entire class. Then she laughed at me. Then others laughed nervously. I walked up to the subway station afterward, devastated but not by the remarks – I was shell-shocked by the fact that someone so purposefully, deliberately hurtful was going to become a minister, and is today. By the time I reached the subway, I knew I had to quit. But then God got on the subway car & miraculously, at rush hour on Bloor Street, the seat beside me came open. God, in a business suit, started a conversation, about a book she was reading, and within a few moments, I felt physically lighter, then my soul felt warm & full again. By the time God got up to leave, the subway car was glowing & I couldn't figure out why no one else seemed to notice. As I watched her leave, she disappeared from sight.

How do we recognize God? How do you recognize anyone? If I take off my glasses, which carry a reasonably high prescription, the whole world becomes a Monet painting – lovely & fuzzy & slightly muted & no definition. The other day, I was leaving the church & going out to my car just as Rev. John was coming back to the office after an appointment. I was not wearing my glasses [relax, I wear them to drive!] but at a distance of at least 30 feet, I knew, without a doubt, it was John. I couldn't rely on my eyes so how did I recognize him? First of all, I've met him before. We don't *recognize* strangers – we can meet strangers, but if we *recognize* someone, we must already know them. Remember the folks on the first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem – they couldn't recognize someone they didn't know. I knew John in the parking lot by his movement, his walk, and his voice when he called to say hello. We recognize the God in the same ways.

If we already seek to *know* God, through His Word, through His blessings, through the actions of believers, then we'll recognize the way He looks, moves & sounds. Where do you see God? Perhaps in the natural world, in mountains & oceans & flawless summer skies? Please remember to say thanks. The first time I baptised a baby, I held that perfect girl over the basin & started to cry, because I'm sure I saw the face of God in her shiny, trusting eyes. Yet, Mother Teresa said she saw Christ in the face of the suffering. Do you feel God's touch when the wind blows, or a spring rain catches you outdoors, or an unexpected hug answers an unspoken need? Do you feel His leading, His nudges in a certain direction when a phone call or text or meeting 'out of the blue' alters your plans? Do you hear God in the voice of firm affirmation as well as kind correction? Do you recognize His hand in so-called 'luck', or phenomenal timing, or a surprisingly grace-filled confrontation? And when you know, really *know*, how close God is to you, how do you feel? That's what they were missing in Jerusalem long ago, that's what we all miss when we fail to stay alert to all the ways God is present to us. Guaranteed, God is here right now, right where you're sitting, in your very next breath – look around, listen, be still, and be at peace.