**Living within the Hour:**

**Our Mission of Love**

**3-28-21**

Ah, the ticker-tape parade: a New York City event that has happened 195 times since the first impromptu celebration in 1886 of the arrival of the Statue of Liberty from France.

* Over the next 135 years this special honor would be reserved for Kings & Dignitaries from around the world, Military Leaders returning from victories, Multiple firsts in flight & space exploration, and New York City sports heroes & championship teams.
  + The New York Yankees having enjoyed the most ticker-tape parades with 9.
  + Interestingly, of 195 parades only 24 have occurred in the last 50 years.
  + And only one has honored a sitting President – Harry S. Truman – at the end of World War II.

But while New York City might have added ticker-tape to the parade, the idea of parades to welcome home conquering heroes actually came from the ancient Roman Republic.

* These heroic generals would lead a procession of troops and captives and spoils through the streets of Rome accompanied by loud music and giant vats of burning incense that would overtake the entire city with a magnificent aroma.
* The Apostle Paul even describes one such parade in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and as an illustration of Christ’s victory over Satan when he writes:

*14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*

So when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem that day astride the prophesied colt of a donkey, people went nuts.

* Their conquering hero had finally arrived!
  + They had no ticker-tape nor any incense – in fact they had no official authority at all.
    - This was truly an impromptu, grass-roots event that had people cutting down palm branches and laying their cloaks in the road for their Messiah to walk upon.
  + Word of his raising Lazarus from the dead just two miles outside the city limits of Jerusalem had reached the ears of the city.
    - And rumors of his miraculous power had come in from all over Judea and Galilee.
    - Now, just as had been prophesied by Zechariah, here he came down the mount of Olives, riding on the colt of a donkey.

*9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!*

*Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

*Behold, your king is coming to you;*

*righteous and having salvation is he,*

*humble and mounted on a donkey,*

*on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

* + - * Not exactly a Roman chariot, but it fit the context perfectly.
  + Jesus is being heralded by the people as King:

*37 As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works 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!”* (Luke 19:37-38)

* + - And the mood of the city is such that the Pharisees and other leaders in Jerusalem were seriously concerned.

*19 So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”* (John 12:19)

* Everything seems perfectly prepared for Jesus to step into His Messianic calling – to become King and use His power to remove the Romans and establish His Kingdom.
  + Is this not God’s will?
    - Is this not what the prophets of old had predicted?
  + Now would be the time to make His move.
    - He has the power
    - He has the people
    - And He has the prophecy.
  + Everything seems to have aligned in this very moment.
    - No one could deny that the circumstances have come together for “all things to work together for good”.
    - Even the densest of His followers could read the writing on this wall – the time was NOW.
    - God was in this and nothing could stop Him.
    - For Jesus to do anything else but take His rightful throne would disappoint everyone dear to Him and leave His nation to the ferocious wolves of Rome.
  + And yet, at this pinnacle of power & popularity, Jesus stands down.
    - And by the end of the week, the throngs abandon Him, choosing to place their hope in an insurrectionist named Barabbas instead.
      * He didn’t have the power of Jesus.
      * But at least he wasn’t a sheep of a man who seemed to have all the power of heaven and earth at his disposal but was incapable of using it.

So, why did Jesus choose the way of the cross rather than the way of power & popularity to accomplish His mission?

* There are many answers to that question, but they all boil down to this: Jesus’ mission was not to conquer the world – it wasn’t even to save the world.
  + Jesus’ mission was to do the will of His Father.
    - Do you remember what He said from our passage last week in John 12:27-28?

*27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.”*

* + - Or maybe you remember what we read a month ago in John 17, when Jesus prayed in vss. 1 & 5…

*1 “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you…5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

* + In other words, as much as Jesus loved us, it was not His love for us that moved him to forego the way of popularity and power to accomplish His mission and instead choose the cross.
    - What motivated Jesus to choose the cross was His love for His Father and His desire to bring glory to His Father’s name.
    - And John 3:16 tells us that it was the Father’s love for us that compelled Him to sacrifice His Son on our behalf.
      * It was Jesus who said:

*16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

* + Jesus chose the cross first and foremost because of His love for His Father, not because of His love for us.
    - A truth that the Apostle Paul affirms in Romans 5:8 when He writes:

*8 …but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

* Now am I saying that Jesus didn’t love us?
  + Of course not. The Apostle Paul also wrote in Ephesians 5:2:

*2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

* + Clearly, Jesus did love us –
  + But note that even here in this passage where Paul affirms Christ’s great love for us…
    - He also points out that the ultimate motivation of His act of love was as an offering to His Father.
    - It was a “sacrifice to God” – a “fragrant offering to Him”.
    - This is what motivated Jesus to reject the popularity of the crowds and choose the suffering of the cross.

Now if this doesn’t sound like the ultimate in a distinction that makes no difference, then I don’t know what does.

* It seems as if I am trying to find some new twist on the Palm Sunday story based on just the finest of theological points.
* But appearances can be deceiving – because for Jesus, this distinction made all the difference when it came to defeating Satan and saving the world.
  + And He tells us that it will make all the difference for us as well.

Let’s go back to the passage that we read at the beginning of today’s message – a passage that we would not normally think to read on Palm Sunday.

* This is an event that occurred some time before the events of Palm Sunday when Jesus sent out 36 teams of his disciples, two by two, to prepare the way for him to enter the different towns and cities He was going to visit in the coming weeks.
  + In the first 16 verses of Luke 10 we read of a series of instructions that He gives them to prepare them before He sending them out.
  + And then, in verse 17 and following, we read of what they report to Him when they return:

*17 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”*

* + - These guys are excited! And Jesus is excited for them. We read:

*8 And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.*

* + - Jesus loves the fact that His disciples had taken the authority and power that He had given them and used it so effectively.
      * And He promises them more of the same as they continue walking and working in His name.
  + But then He unexpectedly warns them of something that He considers to be of utmost importance:

*20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

* + - In other words, as great as all this is – as amazing and powerful as this experience as been – don’t make it your motivation for life & ministry.
      * Don’t let your experience of the power of God or your enmeshment in the ministry of God become the basis of your relationship with God.
        + For this power cannot be the source of your joy and this ministry cannot be the source of your life.
        + And if you try to make them so, it will leave you always looking for the next experience or the next effective ministry model.

Believe me when I say that I know all about trying to build my Christian life on the foundation of “accomplishing great things for God”.

* I excelled in my church growing up, counseling in camps from the time I was 12 and preaching my first sermon when I was a junior in High School.
  + I also excelled in College & Seminary and was seen as a very promising prospect.
  + After marriage and completing seminary, Nancy and I planted a church and when it grew, we led in buying land and building a church building.
* But after a while, I began to feel empty – hollow – inside, feeling alone and abandoned by God.
  + And this crisis led to the near total destruction of my life and the life of my family.
    - I left ministry and nearly left God, only to discover Him waiting for me on the other side.
    - And when He and I finally “had it out”, I complained about feeling as if there had been some great bait and switch.
      * That He had called me His son, but then I felt like nothing more than His employee.
      * That I was only valuable to Him in what I could accomplish for Him.
        + I was angry and hurt.
        + And in the midst of the tears and the shouting, in my heart I heard him whisper: “who told you that?”
    - Who told you that your value was tied up in what you could do for me?
      * Who told you that my love for you was based on your productivity or your behavior?
      * Who told you that the way to live within this hour is to make it your mission to save the world?
      * It wasn’t me.
* And so began my journey back home, discovering that I had accepted the wrong mission for my life.
  + I thought I had been sent out to save the world, but that was not true.
    - I had been sent out to love and serve the One who was saving the world.
    - And out of my love-relationship with Him, we would partner together to accomplish His purposes in His ways by His power for His glory.
* In Luke 10, Jesus suddenly begins to rejoice, but now not because He saw Satan fall from heaven, but because He saw the love of God poured out on the 72 disciples.

*21 In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*

* + Yes, Jesus was excited for the 72 as they experienced what it was to function in the power of His name.
  + But even more so, He exults in their relationship with His Father.
    - We don’t see it, but the Greek word used here describing Jesus rejoicing is not the normal Greek word for rejoice.
      * It describes a rejoicing that moves into exultation and worship.
        + It is a joy that wells up from deep within – a core kind of joy that overwhelms the soul.
    - And Luke describes it as coming out of Christ’s Trinitarian depths.
      * One of those rare moments in the Scriptures where the Son is overcome by the Spirit in His exultation of the Father.
      * The Trinity singing together, but over what?
    - Why over His initiating a personal and intimate relationship with these, the simplest of men.
      * Choosing to befriend and partner with those that the world would reject as unsophisticated, poor, unlearned, simple-minded.
      * Choosing them over those the world thought to be wise and righteous.
    - From the depth of His soul Jesus gushes forth praise to His Father – the Holy Spirit pouring out of Him like a river of exaltation – over God’s redemption and acceptance of these disciples.
  + But He can’t leave it there – for then He immediately moves into declaring the wonders of His own love-relationship with His Father in vs. 22.

*22 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

* + - Here is His own motive for ministry – the source of His mission; the target of His love.
      * This is what moves Him, motivates Him.
      * This is, as the author of Hebrews writes, *the joy set before Him.*
      * That He can bring glory to the Father by walking in His Father’s will – by being the very Word and Action of God.
* Friends, do we understand that this connection to His Father – this undying, unswerving love for His Abba – was what made it possible for Jesus to refuse the temptation of power & popularity?
  + Go back to the temptation of Christ in the desert and see what it was that enabled Him to resist the tempter.
    - When Satan specifically tempted Him to forego God’s plan and instead rely on power & popularity…
      * “Dive off the pinnacle of the temple and call upon the angels to swoop in and save you so that your power might be evident to all…
        + Surely, they’ll make you King.”
    - Jesus’ response was, *‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*
      * I will not misuse the power given me, I will not presume upon the love poured out for me.
      * It would violate the relationship – the trust – that Father and I enjoy.
  + Or when Satan tempted Him to enjoy the benefits of world dominion without suffering the cross when showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world and said:

*6 “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”*

* + - But again, Jesus was able to resist the temptation accomplish what would look like God’s purposes Satan’s way.
      * Instead, He responds by once again declaring how taking this route would violate His love relationship with the Father.

*8 And Jesus answered him, “It is written,*

*“‘You shall worship the Lord your God,*

*and him only shall you serve.’”*

* + Do you see the foundation of Jesus’ life and ministry?
    - It all comes back to His love for the Father every…single…time.

This is why the Great Commission is not the Great Commandment.

* The Great Commission arises OUT OF the Great Commandment.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.*

* + The SECOND greatest commandment is similar to it, but arises out of the first:

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

* + And the Great Commission is the result of both.

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, as you go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.*

Jesus refused to get the order of this mixed up – not on Palm Sunday nor on Good Friday.

* His mission – His continual focus – was His love for the Father and His desire to bring Him glory.
  + That love sustained Him when tempted in the desert, when tempted in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and when tempted in the garden when His hour came on Good Friday.
  + And that love relationship with God is the only thing that will sustain us as we live within this hour as well.
* Jesus finished His conversation with the 72 by reminding them of just how privileged they were to enjoy this amazing intimacy with God…
  + And so I will finish with those same words:

*23 Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

* + Because of the Father’s great love for us and Jesus’ undying love for His Father, a way has been made for us to know God’s love and to enjoy Him forever.
    - Let us never be content to live for lesser things.