

Questioning Our Core Values:
“Jesus’ Trail of Tears”
Luke 19:41-44

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If you happen to love basketball as much as I do, March Madness is a strange mixture of cheers and tears. Wins and loses are determined in split seconds leaving fans in the arena shouting for joy or crying in pain. Such is life.

Palm Sunday is a little bit like that. Children are singing. Hosannas are ringing; even the rocks begin to roll a little bit for joy. But not everyone this Palm Sunday is happy. Hear this scripture that has been shared from the Gospel of Luke from the Palm Sunday narrative, “*As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.*” While the crowds were rejoicing, Jesus was crying. Isaiah was right, “*He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*” And that is where I want to land with this meditation on the way to Communion this morning.

JESUS SHEDS TEARS OF SADNESS

Jesus is shedding tears, tears of sadness over what might have been. “*Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.*”

A British journalist wrote a book recently, asking what might have been if major world events had gone differently? What if Napoleon had not met his Waterloo? What if Great Britain had won the Revolutionary War? What if the Japanese had not bombed Pearl Harbor? What if Al Gore had inherited 9/11? Life is full of “what ifs.”

Day by day we go our merry ways assuming life to be just the way it is. In reality, however, things are not so determined. Life does not consist of big decisions. Life is made up of the “nearlies,” the “almosts,” the “not fars.” We almost got the things we missed and we almost missed the things we got. Sometimes we wonder, what might have been?

Is that not what Jesus is doing here? I do not presume to know the heart and mind of Jesus, but is that not what he is doing here as He casts his eye over Jerusalem? Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if you had known and learned the path of peace, what might have been? Oh, religious leaders, if you had accepted your Messiah, what might have been? Oh, you in the crowd who are shouting, if you had really learned how to love your enemies, what might have been?

I know that was then. We have traveled different roads and we cannot go back again. There is no use giving in and there is no way to know what might have been. But sometimes you wonder, and it makes you want to cry.

JESUS SHEDS TEARS OF SURRENDER

Jesus cries tears of surrender this week. Fast forward to Thursday, we know it as Maundy Thursday now. The scene is the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are sleeping. Jesus is praying. He is pleading with God, *“Let this cup pass from me.”* And then the text gets intense. *“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”* Does anybody know what is happening here?

If we are good Calvinists, as many people are, the whole scene does not make much sense. If Christ was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, what choice did he really have in this deal? Why is he asking to be excused? But what if life is not so cut and dry? What if it is not so predetermined? What if Jesus did have a choice? What if he really did consider escaping down the Kidron Valley, as he very easily could have done, that night? What if feeling the weight of the sins and the pain and brokenness of the world, for at least that brief moment, he cries out to God and says, *“It’s too much!”* Tears of surrender?

I do not know what Jesus felt. I know I could never feel that because it is too much. I do know how heavy my sins feel at times. I know how hard it is to break the bad habits I have. I know sometimes I have to turn off the television because I cannot stand to watch one more child suffering, or one more soldier killed. I know that the valley of suffering is dark and the shadows of death are real.

That is just my perspective. How can I begin to comprehend what Jesus must have felt in that moment, sensing the pain and the brokenness of the world as he cries out to his Abba, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.”*

We need to sense and understand that he, in fact, drank the cup. If the cup tasted too bitter and the anguish felt too great, then we ask the question, what gave him the courage to do it anyway? Let me suggest just a thought or two. One is he had tremendous trust in his Father, Abba. You remember how he said it? *“If you, being evil, want only good for your children, how much more does your heavenly Father want good for you?”* He trusted his Father. The second thing, it seems to me that empowered him to do it was that he believed in a higher purpose. It was not about Him anymore. It was about the redemption of the world. Do I have that kind of trust in God? We cannot walk this Via Delarosa together this week without asking the question, do I have that kind of trust? Do I have that kind of devotion to higher purposes? Jesus wept that week. He wept tears of surrender.

WE SHED TEARS FOR SALVATION

It is Friday now. The kangaroo court is over, the trial is finished, He is on His way to the cross, carrying an old rugged cross on his back. The critics are there, the common people are there, no longer shouting Hosannas, but stunned to silence. The women are weeping and wailing. Jesus stops and turns to them saying, *“Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, weep for yourselves and your children”* (LUKE 23:28) Do not weep for me, it is all settled. Weep for yourselves and your children. Weep in the hope salvation has come.

Hugh Price Hughes was a leader of Methodism in the last half of the 19th century. Some called him the king of the Methodist pulpit in England. When he died in 1902, the Lord Chancellor of England had these words inscribed on Hughes' tomb: "There lies silent the greatest spiritual force my generation has produced."

We do not read much about Hugh Price Hughes, but his daughter wrote a biography about her father, and in it she shares these words: "When Daddy came home on Sunday night from service, if no one had been saved, he was inconsolable. He wouldn't eat, he wouldn't drink, he wouldn't even take his coat off. He would just throw himself on the bed and cry 'Why? Why? Why?'"

I do not know about you, but I do not know any Methodist preachers who lament that much over the lost. If clergy became as passionate about saving souls as they are about selecting appointments, this old broken ship of Methodism just might find new steam. "*O Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and your children.*"

If you visit the Stations of the Cross this week, you will come to the encounter of Jesus and the women at Station 8. A traditional prayer at this point goes something like this: "O Jesus, grant that I may understand the true meaning of your passion and be so inflamed with love for you, that I may shed tears of blood over my past transgressions."

It is Holy Week! Will you drink this Cup? Will you eat this Bread? The cup is the cup of salvation. The bread is the bread of life. Would you drink it and eat it for the salvation of your soul? Amen.