

## **TEARS AT A PARADE**

**Luke 19:28-44**

**Preached by Shaun Poisson-Fast on Sunday, March 25, 2018**

**Knox-Metropolitan United Church – Regina SK – Treaty 4 Territory**

**Originally Preached by Tom Stickland on March 24, 2002**

***Tom passed away on February 27, 2018. His years of creative and thoughtful contributions to so many aspects of life at this church will be remembered, and he will be deeply missed.***

Jerusalem was alive! This is the Holy City to Jewish people throughout the world, was crowded, and becoming more congested every day:

Crowded by huge number of strangers making their pilgrimage to the city to observe Passover in the sacred Temple, the most important of the year's three great religious feasts, the Passover brought enormous number of Jewish people from every corner of the Roman world, crowding the four major roads leading to the city and swelling the population.

Crowded by fortifying legions of Roman soldiers accompanying the governor, Pontius Pilate, on one of his official visits to the city; and making the authority assumed by the hated Romans even more visible;

Crowded by an influx of sellers and traders attracted by the crowds.

One commentary describes the scene in these words: "...a polyglot babble of accents and foreign tongues; under the alert, watchful eye of Roman soldiers...a cosmopolitan throng, beset on every side of raucous, aggressive hawkers and professional beggars...haggling over prices, shouting and teasing, furiously single-minded buyers and sellers alike. Laid out on tables or held up to view was a kaleidoscopic display of trinkets and find goods. Slaves and servants buying food and provisions for their masters; farmers offering fresh fruit and vegetables...the streets thronged with domestic animals, including those being brought to the Temple for sacrifice and those being offered for sale to pilgrims...also people without any work...were a constant presence in the streets of Jerusalem..."

At the time of this Passover, Jerusalem's base population was about 80,000 people, but the religious festival would swell the number by anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000 visitors.

But also, beneath this cosmopolitan buzz of excitement, Jerusalem was crackling with tension:

- the negative tension caused by this sudden population increase and its demand on goods and services available in the city;
- the negative tension caused by Pontius Pilate's visitation, which meant criminal trials, convictions and public punishments including crucifixions, of Jewish citizens;
- tensions among the orthodox Jewish leaders who wanted to seize the opportunity to curry favour with Pontius Pilate, and one way or another enlist his involvement in dealing with their troublesome "Jesus Problem";
- and as well, the tension of excitement and anticipation, created by a growing number of citizens and pilgrims, convinced that now was the time that the long-hoped-for Messiah would come and establish the kingdom of God, starting right there in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was hot, dusty, crowded and noisy with excitement, tension and expectation!!

Meanwhile, in the valley below, two or three miles away from the city, in the village of Bethany, Jesus and his disciples are gathered together, perhaps relaxing for a few days, before they would, at Jesus' insistence, go up to Jerusalem to observe the feast of the Passover.

In recent weeks and months, Jesus' work has become busier, more urgent perhaps. The Gospels tell of lots of travelling back and forth through the regions of Judea, many healings, many speeches to ever-increasing numbers of people. He has become more prophetic, without being apparently too specific, in speaking about what will happen to the "Son of Man" (as he describes himself) before his work will be finished and he keeps his covenant with God. Just within the preceding few days, Jesus had,

astoundingly, restored his friend Lazarus to life!! And can there be any doubt that this news was travelling swiftly throughout the nation and bringing thousands of people to Bethany and to Jerusalem hoping to meet this person, catch sight of him, be touched by him!

Until this time, Jesus had done what he could to minimize the public nature of his ministry. In the stories detailed in the Gospels he has repeatedly told those to whom he has ministered, “Tell no one” or “Go and tell the priests” or just “Go and sin no more”. And then characteristically he would disappear into the crowds and slip away. He had been caught up in some public debates and arguments with the Pharisees and scribes, although I think it is accurate to say that he hadn’t gone looking for these opportunities; and in his travels he had always avoided direct confrontation with Roman soldiers.

But, especially with the raising of Lazarus, any thought of Christ’s ministry remaining private, or any indications that he any longer wanted it to be, would seem to have vanished!

Leaving aside the two questions we may want to ask – How did Jesus know what was going to happen? And secondly, how could he be sure? – it is clear in the recorded events of those days that he did know that there had to be an event, a deliberate confrontation that would precipitate the events of Good Friday and Easter, and that it would happen in Jerusalem.

Despite his disciples concern for his safety (and undoubtedly theirs), Jesus decides that they will go up to Jerusalem, and they join the other pilgrims on the road and begin climbing the hill to the Holy City. They are joined perhaps by many coming now towards Bethany in search of Jesus, who having found him turn and join him on his journey, led by Jesus, riding on a donkey – surely the most unpredictable of steeds, but deliberately chosen as a symbol of the humility of our Lord – led by Jesus who is no longer chastising or rebuking the crowds for drawing attention to him – it is this crowd, loudly and joyously, hopefully, hailing Jesus as the anointed one, “He who comes in the name of the Lord”, and their king – this crowd, with Jesus as their focus that stops the heartbeat of the Holy City with its entrance!

As they get closer to the gate, some of the Pharisees, perhaps merely onlookers to the spectacle, perhaps swept up in the tide of people attempt to minimize the event: “Master, rebuke your disciples!” And Jesus shouts back,

“I tell you that even if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out!”

With this entrance, and later in the day, with Jesus’ attack on the money changers in the Temple, and his healing of a blind beggar on the Sabbath, the outrage becomes too much for the Sanhedrin – highest court of justice & supreme council in ancient Jerusalem, and the events that will follow are firmly set in motion, one can only stand in speechless awe at the strength of Jesus in this week, his inestimable love and compassion expressed to friends and enemies alike; his courage; his steadfast belief in what he was about, and his unshakable faith in God, his Father. But, all of that is yet to come, for the moment, Jesus is in the middle of a celebration, - who can guess how many people at the core, surrounding him and his disciples, how many running ahead, and following behind, caught up in the drama of the moment!

In the middle of this hubbub, Jesus has perhaps a moment of unhappiness, not just about what is still to come, but at what he may have felt was left undone, perhaps he is also remembering as he rides an earlier day, when as a child he spent a happy day at the Temple conversing and praying with the elders, reading to them, and with them, his Father’s words – a moment of wondering what he and his disciples might have done differently.

As he enters the East Gate, in a moment perhaps of human regret, and profound compassion, Jesus is seen crying “tears at a parade”, probably in a voice more to himself than those around him, he speaks to the city of Jerusalem, and to us:

“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace, but now, they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side, they will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

Surely those words must resonate within us as we read about the horrific daily events occurring in Jerusalem today!

But are not these words, as well, directed straight to us – even more to us today perhaps, standing on this side of that first Easter!

If we have read, and understood the testimonies of the “great cloud of witnesses” that Paul reminds us of, if we have seen the blessings of Christ experienced in the lives of people around us and known to us, if we have been ourselves touched by the gift of God’s grace, surely we have been and are witness to the visitation of God. Surely these experiences require of us the obligation to extend Christ’s kingdom in our time, to act in ways that bless the lives of those we touch with God’s gifts of love and peace.

To that, may all of God’s children say “Amen!”