

*Lift Up Your Hearts, Pt. 6*  
***Climbing Toward Peace***  
*Luke 19: 36-41; Is. 25: 6-9*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Palm Sunday, March 20, AD 2016  
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All during Lent, we have been questing upwards toward Christ. In particular, we have considered what it means that the man Jesus is, even now, seated at the right hand of his Father in heaven. Last week, we looked at what Jesus is doing now. He is praying for us, standing at the throne as our advocate, and guaranteeing a future in which the world will be set right. This week, we're going to surface two more crucial questions. We all ask these questions, though we seldom speak them out loud. 1) Where's it all going? What's going to become of the world? And 2) What am I supposed to do today? In other words, given where the world is going, how I do live my life now? So, where's it all going and what am I supposed to do about it? Those questions will flow underneath all we consider from the Scriptures.

On Palm Sunday, as Jesus made his way, the people did not know what would be occurring just five days later. They did not know Jesus would have to pass through death in order to reign as the king of life. They did not know that their true King would rule from a throne made of the wood of the cruel cross. They simply recognized in that moment that Jesus was their long-awaited Savior. For a moment, the deep yearning for a Redeemer burst forth in the joy that he had finally come. So Luke tells us, "The whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." They mirrored what Luke recorded the angels singing 33 years earlier at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men." What had been promised was being fulfilled. The baby in Bethlehem had grown to be the Messiah in Jerusalem. The people full heartedly in great voice declared Jesus to be the Savior for whom the world had waited. Heaven and earth were at last being reconciled.

Of course, this high praise seemed like blasphemy to the Pharisees. Only the LORD I AM himself should be so praised, for they knew that the Messiah would be no less than God himself coming to save his people. So they told Jesus to silence his disciples. Get them in line. This adoration is out of hand. But Jesus replied, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

This is not just a toss off line about how popular Jesus was at the moment. There are huge implications in the declaration, “if these people were silent, the very stones would cry out.” What Jesus does effects the entire created order. The arrival of a Redeemer in Jerusalem is of cosmic significance. For our God is not just interested in saving souls. He wants to restore the earth to his original intention. He wants to remake the world to become a theatre for his glory. He wants a realm where human beings in his image multiply in love and rule in justice over a flourishing creation that becomes ever more beautiful and interesting and magnificent. The point has always been an entire creation reclaimed and renewed.

So Paul tells us in Romans 8: 19, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... [for] the creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Ever since our fall, death entered the world. The whole created order was affected by our sin. And the very earth and all its inhabitants long to be restored. This little passage gives us a huge vision of a renewed humanity that leads the whole creation to rejoice in our God. The whole earth will be set free for life when God’s plan is fully realized.

Earlier today we read a grand vision of the mountain of the LORD that is our future. Isaiah wrote,

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.  
And he will swallow up on this mountain  
the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.  
He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.  
It will be said on that day,  
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.  
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

In these days, death comes to us all. Death has ever been envisioned as a great beast swallowing up all in its path. Death is the devourer. The monster with an

appetite that can never be satisfied. Its wide mouth gobbles all and releases none. But in this vision, the monster death itself will be swallowed by the Lord of Life. The big fish that chomps down every life will be scooped up and devoured by the God who is Life in himself.

These days a pall hangs over every relationship: the realization that one day we will be parted. A weight presses on every life: the threat of mortality which could strike anytime. The gloom floats in the air that we could destroy the earth, either by blowing ourselves up or so fouling the air and water that no one can live. We know we could run out, use it all up or mar everything beyond health.

But Isaiah's vision tells us that destruction is not God's end game. Where's it all going? To a day where the pall of death is lifted. To a day where the great and mighty God stoops tenderly to wipe tears from our faces. Touching us gently he will declare,

It's all right. It's all fixed now. It's all put back together.  
Don't die any longer. Live.  
Don't cry any longer. Rejoice.  
Don't strive any longer. Love.  
I am your God. This is what you waited for. I will make it so.

Centuries later, Isaiah's vision would be taken up and refined in the light of Jesus. In Revelation 21, we read of a magnificent future, for us, and indeed for all creation:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."  
And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

On Palm Sunday Jesus knew where it's all going. He knew that creation had to cry out with joy that a redeemer had come. Much struggle yet awaited him, but

on Palm Sunday the curtain on that future was pulled back for a peek: the future is not grief but joy. The end is not destruction but a renewed cosmos. It is humanity restored to our place as the image of God, ruling over a creation that glorifies God in all its splendid diversity and magnificent beauty.

What's coming? An earth made new. But note, this new earth is in continuity with the old earth. It is the old earth renewed. It is the old field redug for a new crop. It is all things made right at last.

How do we know this? Because we look at Jesus. He is the forerunner. He is the firstfruit of the new harvest. Jesus passed from Palm Sunday to the horror of Gethsemane's agony, the disciples' betrayal, the chief priest's condemnation and Golgotha's horrible cross. He died and was buried. But then he rose on the third day. He returned in the same body in which he had been crucified. He was still Jesus. But now he was renewed. Jesus in resurrection was the same man he had been, only more so. Now he was man restored beyond original glory. On Easter Jesus was the man they had known but often didn't recognize because he was rippling with eternal life, shimmering with heaven's glory. He was like the man he had been and he was not like that man, for he was free from death and decay.

Remember the key principle we have been talking about. Jesus was the man for all men and women. What he has is what we will have. His future is our future. Man made, new, restored for everlasting life. That's what's coming.

So what about our second question. What difference does that future make to my life now? How does what's coming for me, and even the whole creation, affect me day to day? C. S. Lewis compares our life now with our life to come by thinking in terms of horses. These bodies we have right now are just like the ponies that will be out on North Blvd for our children to ride after worship. They are small, tame and not likely to go charging off. The bodies we will have in heaven will still be us, but they will be more like great stallions, rippling with power. This is how he says it:

These small perishable bodies we now have were given to us as ponies are given to schoolboys. We must learn to manage them: not that we may someday be free of horses altogether but that someday we may ride bare-back, confident and rejoicing, those greater mounts, those winged, shining and world-shaking horses which perhaps even now expect us with impatience, pawing and snorting in the King's stables. Not that the gallop would be of any value unless it were a gallop with the King; but how else—since He has

retained His own charger—should we accompany Him? (Lewis, *Miracles*, chp 16).

The future awaiting us is a magnificent charger. But right now we dwell in bodies more like ponies. But ponies still have a will that must be tamed. They still have habits to learn and work to do. We learn to manage life in these pony-bodies in order to get ready to ride stallions. One day, even our fiercest appetites and desires now will seem like pale, anemic, even petulant wants. Even the most powerful men today will seem like toddlers compare to the least in heaven, so mighty will be the power and emotions of our stallion bodies in heaven. The King, the Lord Jesus, he has retained his own charger—he is still in a body. And he wants to go galloping with us. He wants to ride across the new heavens and the new earth with his brothers and sisters. So I want to learn to tame this pony so I can get ready to ride in the King's future.

And actually, that's the whole point in day to day life now. We live as those informed with a higher, greater vision of humanity and the world. We know the world is bound for renewal in life and justice and peace. And we are bound for glory. So we are free to have done with lesser things. We are free to live out heaven's values now. To join our God in stooping to wipe away tears. To join our God in embracing the little ones. To join our God in seeking the lost. To join our God in opening our hands to release bread to the hungry. To embrace prodigals, kiss lepers and stand on the side of sinners in gracious forgiveness. Because we know where all this is going. And we want to prepare to ride in the glory of the king on magnificent stallions.

It's seldom been better said than Francis of Assisi said it in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Knowing the future God has guaranteed in his son Jesus, this is how we live:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.