

Psalm 118: 19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Luke 19: 28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Did the Crowd Have a Clue?**Rev. Charles Schuster****March 28, 2010**

Bill Coffin said, "Lending drama to the overall excitement of Palm Sunday, the scene, the extraordinary high level of conflict, there is no other place in the Bible an event in which the participants have more conflicting ideas about what's going on." They are there, but they don't know what's going on. They hear it, but they don't understand it. That's just the way it is. It's like the sixteen-year-old daughter who says, "Has anybody seen my new sweater?" and her father says, "You mean, the one that cost me a hundred dollars?" And her sister says, "You mean the one you will never let me wear?" And her brother says, "You mean the stupid one that makes you look fat?" And her grandmother says, "You mean the one with the low neckline?" And her mother said, "Oh, you mean the one that

has to be washed by hand in cold water?" Everyone spoke, but nobody answered the question. Palm Sunday - what was going on? Conflicting stories. When we speak of it, what are we saying? It should be simple enough. I mean, Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowd cheers, the King comes in, palm branches placed on the path, coats removed. But what is it? Is it a coronation? Is it an execution? Is it a confrontation? Or is it all of those?

Jesus, who preached "Love your enemy" realized that doesn't mean you don't have enemies. He did, and they were in the crowd, watching and listening, conflicting ideas about what was going on. You can bet on it. You can win the bet if you did. It doesn't say it, but you know it was true. First of all in the crowd, the Romans were in the crowd. Romans are in the crowd, some of them are here. Some of each of us is Roman, afraid of the revolution, concerned about the crowd, anxious about chaos, the crowd raising hell, raising Cain. Where would it lead? How far would it go? Romans want order. The Roman in us wants order. Ever since 9/11, we worry about crowds. We worried about the guy in Boulder last week. They found anthrax in his backpack. The Roman in us, the stimulus, the bailout, the health plan, the cost, the deficit, crowds in the street, things out of control. Romans always want calm.

Fred Craddock has written a book about his early life in the church. Great preacher, wrote a book entitled *Reflections on My Call to Preach*. He remembered his church, Central Avenue Christian Church. Classes for children were held on the ground floor of this large brick building, and access to the upper floor was by stairs inside and concrete steps outside, and as a small boy from a farm it was an impressive building that was saying to all who entered, "Behave yourself, and be reverent." Most religion teaches that. Behave yourself, and be reverent. Robert Wright in his book, *The Evolution of God*, he says successful religions have always tended to salvation on a social level, encouraging behaviors that bring order, because civilization is constantly threatened by the forces of chaos, and obeying the gods or God was a way to keep chaos at bay. But the crowd following Jesus, raising hell, promoting chaos, and the Romans in the crowd said to the crowd, "Cool it, because if you don't we will." There's a part of all of us that fears chaos.

A certain amount of chaos here at the church now. It started in the church library. There's a magazine rack in the church library. People bring their used magazines, and you can bring them in and people can take them out to read them, and then bring them back, and some church members have noted that Time Magazine and Newsweek Magazine, these are all liberal magazines, and so some church members have thought we ought to have balance in our library, and have brought the conservative publication, The National Review. They brought that magazine in a couple of months ago, and it disappeared about the time I came back from my surgery. And they accused me of stealing it. Now, I'm not above doing that, but I didn't. And so they bring more National Review Magazines in, and then they'd be gone. And then the computer in the library was stolen. And then somebody backed their car or truck or whatever, into the little shed out there where we keep the church van, and then somebody stole a \$300 drill the church bought, and the church is in chaos. And it all began when the National Review was brought into the

library. Coincidence? Probably. Anyway, I don't like it. And we're gonna set a trap, but don't tell anybody.

It's chaos. It's out of control. The Romans said to the crowd, "Cool it," and Jesus, I think, would have said the same thing. He was not a revolutionary in that respect. That wasn't what he brought. He came to bring peace on earth, not to raise hell, but to save people from it. He didn't want to see the crowd turn into a mob. Later on, you know, it did. The crowd turned into a mob. "Crucify him, crucify him," they said. There were Romans in the crowd. There's a Roman part of all of us. And in Jesus. To the crowd, it said, "Cool it." Secondly, there were Pharisees in the crowd. They were a different sort. They were concerned not about revolution, they were concerned about the revelation. The crowd called him Messiah. They said it was revelation. It raised the eyebrows of the Pharisees. The Pharisees wanted a king. They had no need of a messiah, a religious leader. They had religion under control, and they did. They wanted a political liberation, not religious salvation.

Sometimes people, when they use a word, they are divided by a common language. Bill Quick tells about a man who got a temporary job in North Carolina. Several months' work, he needed a place to stay, he answered an ad in the local newspaper, offered a room at an affordable rate, with a strange requirement. "The renter must be a regular churchgoer." He assured the landlady he could meet that condition, and so he moved in. A month later, he had not attended worship anywhere, and the landlady confronted him on his negligence, and reminded him of the condition of his rental. "How do you account for the fact that you've slept in every Sunday, and have yet to darken the doors of a house of God?" she said. "I am," he said, "a man of my word. I go to church regularly. Always have, regularly. Every Christmas and every Easter." I guess he'll be in church somewhere, next Sunday.

They said Jesus was Messiah, and they called him Messiah. It raised the Pharisees' eyebrows. Revelation that made Jesus bigger than they thought he was. "Silence," the Pharisees said, "silence" to the crowd of disciples. But he was Messiah. Not like they wanted. Some time ago, recently here, I was in Nashville, Tennessee for a church meeting, and while I was there I got to meet one of my heroes. Bill Oden is a bishop, he's a great church leader, retired now, Boston University, Harvard Divinity School. He was a bishop in Louisiana. He's bright, articulate, he was courageous as a bishop, he's on the committee that I'm on. And last Tuesday, a week ago, I got to have breakfast with Bill and one of my heroes, his wife Marilyn. Marilyn Oden has been in Bill's shadow most of their married life. She's a writer, and I've quoted her often, here. I have every book she's ever written. Tuesday, March 16th, I sat across the table and I said to her, "Marilyn, what are you working on these days?" and she said, "I'm writing a book about a United Methodist bishop." Imagine that. You know, Bill was bishop in Louisiana for eight years. "I'm writing a book about a United Methodist bishop, but it's a woman bishop, and the title is *The Dead Saint*." And I looked at Bill and laughed, I said, "Bill, that's the first time there will be a United Methodist bishop who made saint." Marilyn looked at me and said, "No you're wrong. The dead saint isn't the woman bishop. You know, Louisiana. You know, New Orleans. The Saint's a football player. He's a kicker for the New Orleans

Saints, and he's from Sarajevo." That could be interesting, and I was wrong. The Pharisees were wrong as well to raise their eyebrows when the crowd called Jesus Messiah. Jesus would have said to the crowd, "Be silent. If you want a political leader, I am not a political leader. But, it isn't about me. I am not to be elevated as a saint. I have come to give my life, not to raise myself to glory. Let the crowd be silent if they think it's just about me. Do not elevate me, for I have come to empty myself. I am not full of myself."

That brings an interesting problem. Thirdly, Jesus would have told the crowd to cool it if they thought he was bringing revolution, and Jesus would have told the crowd to be silent if they thought it was revelation, the they should worship him. To the Romans, he was a warrior. To the Pharisees, he was a pacifist. Too wild for one, and too mild for the other. And the crowd was cheering. And Jesus, not raising hell, not wanting to raise eyebrows, Jesus was raising praising to a new level. When he heard the crowd, the multitude, the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with loud voice, for all the mighty works they had seen, and Jesus knew it. Raising praising to God for the good works they had seen, you cannot stop that. It was a part of them. It's who they were. It's what they were about, and they couldn't help it.

You know, last Sunday, Reverend Miller preached, and he said something in his sermon, if you were here you heard it, about the time in his last church they hired a choir director who was gay. Remember that? I love to hear the other preachers. Last Sunday I got to hear Ray. I was up in the balcony with some of you folks up there, trying to behave myself. And then I went over to Crosswalk, and got to hear Rebecca McFee preach. David Dalke gets to preach again sometime soon. Joel Kershaw, we'll get to hear him before the bishop yanks him out of here to Brighton. I'm still mad about that, by the way. I love to hear our preachers. I'm their biggest fan. Reverend Miller's sermon has made people think about who we are, and the question has been asked this week, many times, by many people. Are we, as a church, welcoming of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, here? And the answer I'm hearing our members speak is, "Yes we are, otherwise, what does Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors mean?" It's not just a slogan, it's not just a set of banners, it's who we are. For Jesus, his followers were raising praising, it was because that's who they were.

This past week I met someone who was praising God. I'm sure you know this, Holy Week is a hard time for church staff, we've got to multi-task. We've got worship services, we've got bulletins, we've got problems to solve and visits to make and letters to write and classes to teach, and the printer breaks down, which it did, and the computer gets sick, has a virus, which it did. Monday, I'm in my car multi-tasking as I'm driving on Harmony, seeking harmony, by the way. Talking on my cell phone, steering the car with my knees, putting a CD into the CD player, Brahms Requiem. I wanted to hear it before I heard it. And on the corner of Harmony and Timberline I met someone I'd never met before. The meeting was serendipitous. My car hit the back of his car. He pulled over, and I pulled over, and I honestly will never multi-task in a car again. I shouldn't have done it. Don't do that, and I won't either. My car put a scratch on his bumper. I told him I was so sorry, I admitted it was my fault. You're never supposed to do that, but it was my

fault. I said, "Do you want my name and phone number and insurance information, the mortgage to my house, what can I do for you?" He looked at me and he said, "It's nothing. Just a little paint will fix that up." Then he turned to leave, and he said, "Praise God" and I said, "Thank you, Jesus."

You know, it seems to me that a man who can praise God when some idiot whacks the back of his car, can praise God any time, any place, and he will not be silent. It seems to me we need more people like that, because the world is full of people who pain God, they don't praise God. There's a wilderness area, some of you have probably been to it, the Bridger Wilderness Area, they have these cards that they give people who go there. People fill out the cards and turn them back in to the staff. Here are some of the suggestions. "Trails should be reconstructed to avoid trails that go uphill." "The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake." Get this one - "A small deer came into my camp and stole a jar of pickles. Is there any way I can get reimbursed? Please call." and then they leave the phone number. I'd give you the phone number. We all ought to call them. "There are too many rocks on the mountains." And then this one - "The places where the trails do not exit are not well marked."

Complain to God because things go wrong, complain to God because life is hard, there's so much of that. Let it stop. Praise God for the beauty of the day and the stars at night, praise God for the hope that comes in the darkest time, and praise God for friends who will stand with you when you feel alone and sad, and praise God for the joy of living, and for the memories of the past, and for the meaning of those times when you can't see movement, but you can just savor moments. Praise God. Never let it stop. Let it become part of who we are. Praise God. It's in the Psalm - "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, O give thanks to God for God is good, and God's mercy endures forever." Jesus knew that. That's why he could not silence the crowd. The Romans didn't understand it, and the Pharisees didn't get it. Only Jesus heard the crowd praising, raising praising to God, and he knew the cross was coming. He knew what we know about death. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Requiem, and then next Sunday, we and that guy from North Carolina, we're going to get to hear the greatest story ever told, when the crowd raising praising becomes a church, and Christ is risen again.