

Faithfulness

3-24-2013

Luke 19:28-40

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' " 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They replied, "The Lord needs it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

By Faith, I know we just saw that video a few weeks ago, but, I just had to show it to you again. It is such a strong video; and when you really listen, the words, they just mean so much. By Faith... Let's talk about faith just a moment. Faith is (1) firm belief in something for which there is no proof (2): complete trust (3) something that is believed especially with strong conviction. These definitions came from the dictionary which is usually a pretty good place to get the meanings of words, but how about the Bible. Does it define faith? Listen to Hebrews 11: 1, **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** Kind of sums up faith for Christians, doesn't it?

What separates us, Christians, from all the other religions of the world? It is the belief that Jesus Christ was the son of God; that he was crucified on a cross and died; that he was buried, and on the third day he rose from the dead, and, that through belief in Him, we may have everlasting life. Isn't that pretty much it, belief in Jesus Christ. Isn't that what separates us from the other religions of the world. As we enter Holy Week, we need to remind ourselves that this is what Christianity is all about. This week Judas will betray Jesus Christ. This week Jesus Christ will be crucified on a cross. And this week, Jesus Christ will be raised from the dead. This is the holiest week of our church year, because this is what separates us from all the other religions. This is what our faith is based on, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

Today is the sixth Sunday in Lent, and it is Palm Sunday. Our theme for this week is faithfulness. Nancy read, "We light this candle as a symbol of our trust in Jesus Christ that God will always remain faithful, even when we lack faith." Don't we sometimes lack or lose our faith? I will never forget the night I witnessed a friend of mine lose his faith. It was a little over thirty years ago but I remember it like it happened yesterday. My friend of mine lost his younger brother to a single car accident early one morning. The young man who died had been going through a very rough patch in his life. There had been some physical illness, some drug abuse and a good deal of alcohol abuse. But the young man had worked very hard and was beginning to get his life back in order. Then that morning on his way to work, he lost control of his car and died as a result of injuries sustained in the crash. My friend was devastated as was the rest of his family. That night, I was sitting in the living room with my friend. We were discussing the events of the day, how he was coping, and how his family was coping. All of a sudden, my friend leaned back on the couch and began screaming at and cursing God. I was very amazed. I had never witnessed anything like that happen before. To be quite honest, it scared me. I wasn't afraid of my friend, I was afraid of God because of the things my friend was saying and I was in the same room with him. I was truly expecting to see a bolt of lightning hit the room at any time. That night, my friend lost his faith in

God. At a time when he needed to depend on God the most, he lost all faith. It took several years for him to regain his faith. The one thing I do know, I guess you could say the silver lining to the cloud, God never gave up on my friend. No, God stayed faithful to him. That's how God is. He is with each one of us even when we may have doubts, or fears; even when we are in our darkest moment, God never forsakes us. We witnessed that in the video we watched last week.

Our scripture lesson this morning is one that we are all familiar with. It is the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. The account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a colt or a donkey is written about in each of the four gospels, however, Luke is the only one who doesn't mention palm branches or greenery of some type. In verses 35 and 36 we read, **³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.** The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John talk about the crowds shouting "hosanna" and "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," while Luke says it was the disciples who were shouting, not huge crowds. Scholars think Luke was trying to set us up to see the fickle nature of man, to see how man will be unfaithful to Christ. The crowds followed Jesus into town, but later were the same ones who asked Pilot for Jesus' life. There was another entrance into Jerusalem that day. The other entry is one that wasn't written about in any of the four gospels. Jesus came into town on a colt. Colts or donkeys were beast of burden. Donkeys were considered signs of peace. They weren't ridden by kings. Kings rode great war horses. Biblical scholars have determined that at the same time Jesus entered Jerusalem through a back gate on the east side of the town, as He from the Mount of Olives, Pontius Pilot was entering Jerusalem from the west through the front gate of the city. Pilot did not live in Jerusalem, but came from a fort some sixty miles away. He came to town about three times a year to control the crowds. Scholars have determined that during Jesus lifetime, there were approximately sixty armed rebellions against the Romans by the Jews. With this being the celebration of the Passover, Jerusalem was expected to grow from a town of around 100,000 to a town of 2,000,000 to 3,000,000. Therefore, Pontius Pilot came to Jerusalem in full military battle dress with an army of over 600 extra soldiers. They came in through the front gate of the city in a full military parade. They made quite the show with their chariots and horses, their spears and shields held high for all to see. They were waving the Roman banners and crest, beating cadence with their drums as the soldiers and horses marched in. They made quite the spectacle as they came in. They wanted to be sure the Jews knew who was in control. And on the other side of town, came Jesus on a colt, no army, no weapons, no war horses or chariots, no banners or shields. Jesus came in peace.

During the week that was to come, Jesus remained faithful to God. He knew what the coming week was to bring; the humiliation, the pain, the suffering, the slow agonizing death. Yet, Jesus remained faithful to the Father. He went willingly into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Jesus remained faithful to his disciples and to His followers; and where were they? Peter did just as Christ told him he would do, he denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Judas betrayed Him. As Jesus was being tried and crucified, the rest of the disciples hid in fear. On the day Jesus rose from the dead. Where did He go? Jesus returned to the upper room where the disciples and some of His close followers were hiding. Jesus appeared to them. Even after they left, even as they were hiding in fear, Jesus came back to them. Jesus remained faithful to His disciples, just as He remains faithful to us today.

How faithful are we to Jesus? A couple of weeks ago I spoke of how we build walls to separate our worldly lives from our Sunday lives. "Running right through the lives of many people in churches today is a dividing line between what they see as their Christian lives and what they see as their non-Christian lives. This is the so-called sacred/secular divide. This divide is the assumption that God cares about what I do on Sunday morning in church but not on Monday morning in the office." If we are building this wall, are we being faithful to God? Faithfulness is not just a Sunday thing. What would happen to us if God was only faithful to us on Sunday? What would happen to us if Jesus said, I will only forgive you of the sins you commit on Sunday. The rest of the week, guys, you are on your own. That's a pretty scary thought. But, we're okay, God doesn't build a wall between Sunday and the rest of the week. As Christians, we expect God to be there at our beck and call. Whenever we want God, all we need to do is call. Isn't that what we have come to expect? If someone in our family is sick, we will send up a prayer in an instant. If we're looking for a new job, we'll ask God to lead us in

the right direction. If we are having relationship problems, or family problems, or problems on the job, we'll ask God for help and expect him to be there. And guess what; because of His faithfulness to us, He is right there. Any time we look for God, He is there. Actually, whether we're looking for Him or not, God is there. Yet, when everything is right in our lives, so many times we forget that God is still there. The job is going well, the family is all good, life is a bowl of cherries; do we turn to God with thanks, or do we try to take the credit? Yep, because of all my hard work we landed that big contract. I'll get a nice bonus for that. Because I'm such a great dad, my kids never get in any real trouble. I go to the gym and exercise, I take my vitamins and supplements; that's why I stay well. When life is everything we want and more, where is God in our lives. How much credit do we give him? Oh yeah, on Sunday morning, to God be the glory, but what about Monday through Saturday? Where is our faithfulness?

Today is Palm Sunday. We celebrate our Risen Lord's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. But how triumphant was it? Pilot entered from one side, Jesus from the other. Pilot came through the front gate of the city; Jesus came through the back gate. Pilot came with an army; Jesus came with his disciples and a few faithful followers. Pilot came to war and control. Jesus came in peace and to fulfill the prophecies. Listen to Zechariah 9: 9-10, **Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** ¹⁰ **I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.** Pilot came to Jerusalem with an army on the orders of Caesar to control the Jews. He came with chariots, warhorses, and battle bows. Pilot and his army were a spectacle when they entered through the front gates of the city. They were a show of force and might, meant to place fear in the Jews and keep them in line. Jesus came in the back gate on a lowly donkey in peace and in love. He came with his disciples and a few faithful followers. Jesus came because of his faithfulness to God and His faithfulness to us. Jesus came to die for our sins and all we have to do is believe in Him. If you truly are a Christian, then you are indeed a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and eternity with God will be yours.

Amen

Today is the last Sunday in Lent and the beginning of Holy Week. Please be reminded of our Maundy Thursday service this week. Also please sign up for the Good Friday Prayer Vigil. That runs from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The sign-up sheet is in the Narthex. Sunrise Service is going to be held here. We are the host church this year. The service starts at 6:30 AM. Breakfast will follow in the Fellowship Hall.