

Rejoicing For What We Have Seen

Luke 19:28-40

Richard C. Allen

March 28, 2010

South Glastonbury

Connecticut

In my lifetime, I have watched a lot of parades; have been in a few of them. My favorite was the old Grange Fair parade right here in South Glastonbury. There was always loud cheering for the creative floats depicting scenes from our rural life, applause for the marching bands playing John Philips Sousa pieces, and a sea of waving arms and shouts as groups of children walked by in various kinds of uniforms. There was a lot of hoopla, a lot of noise, a lot of high-spirited carrying-on. But when the parade came to an end, usually with a police squad car, there was a kind of deflation, like a big flat tire, all our energy spent. We'd stand there for a minute or two hoping for one more band that maybe got a late start, one more float, but it was over and we were left with the question: now what are we going do?

Palm Sunday is a little bit like the old Grange Fair parade. A crowd had assembled along the road; Jesus came riding along on a colt. With great spontaneity, the on-lookers spread their cloaks on the path as if to create a welcoming red-carpet; they shouted out words of praise; and they recalled the deeds of power they had witnessed over the previous three years. If we listen with all our might, we can hear them calling out across the parade route:

He healed my son's leprosy!

He raised my brother from the dead!

He fed 5000 of us with two loaves of bread!

He changed water into wine at our wedding!

He restored my dignity!

He took away my fear!

He called me down from the sycamore tree!

But that Palm Sunday parade came to an end, too. The joyful cheering quieted down; people turned to go back home; there was a kind of deflation. And everyone was left to wonder, ‘what are we going to do next?’

Palm Sunday is a turning point. It includes that celebratory parade with the loud Hosannas, but it also includes a knowing that darker days are coming. The journey through Holy Week, these next seven days, is a rollercoaster ride. There are the highs and the lows, the victories and the defeats, the welcoming and the abandonment, the tears of sorrow and the tears of exhilaration. So, theologically speaking, Palm Sunday is an awkward day.

As I read through the story again this week, I was struck by the banter in the crowd. As they watched Jesus passing by, they voiced all of the deeds of power they had witnessed in his presence. In a way, this describes what we do here every Sunday morning. In the hymns we sing, in the prayers we pray; in the Scripture we read; in the sermons we proclaim...when we worship we are bearing witness to the mighty deeds of God. That’s really what worship is: a public witness to the ways God is nudging us from brokenness toward wholeness, from being lost to being found again.

So, as a Palm Sunday celebration, I found myself wanting to name where I see the mighty deeds of God unfolding in our world today.

I see the mighty works of God in places like Afghanistan where a hiker gets lost while descending a mountain trail, ends up in a village where there are no schools, drinks three cups of tea with village elders, and ends up building and equipping schools in that underserved region of the world. Three Cups of Tea; perhaps you’ve read the book! One village at a time, one school at a time, this tea-drinking hiker is a light in the world.

If I were at the Palm Sunday parade, I'd be shouting out, "Three cups of tea! Three cups of tea!"

I see the mighty works of God in places like Dowa, Central Malawi, where a high school student dropped out of school because his parents couldn't afford the modest fees. A bright young man and eager to learn, he found his way to the library, read and understood the principles involved in making a wind generator. At the local dump he scavenged old bicycle parts, scrap metal, and put it all together and made a machine that captures the energy of the wind! He's speaking all over Africa now, spreading his knowledge, building hope, bringing electricity to villagers who will turn it into power for grist mills and computer stations and light bulbs and irrigation systems. His simple wind generator is driving hunger away. Maybe you've read his book, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*. If I were at the Palm Sunday parade, I'd be shouting, "Harvest the wind! Harvest the wind! Surely, God wants us to harvest the wind!"

I see the mighty works of God when I hear one adolescent say she has done battle with depression and another from her peer group say 'me too.' I see the mighty works of God when these two find time for each other, support each other, talk with each other, pray together, move together toward wholeness, stare depression in the face and feel hope run through their veins. If I were at a Palm Sunday parade, I'd be shouting out loud, 'Even the darkness is as light to Thee.'

I see the mighty works of God when I receive my occasional e-mail letter from Zachery Hoffman, a former South Church youth, now serving in the Peace Corps in southeastern Morocco. Having majored in Environmental Science at his college, he is working with the government and with local villagers on soil conservation projects.

There, where the wind blows constantly and the soil is forever shifting, he is totally alive to this mission which will allow the planting of trees and a greater stability in food production. If I were at a Palm Sunday parade, I'd be shouting, "Conserve the land."

I saw the mighty deeds of God when, two weeks ago, a handful of South Church 6th graders accepted an invitation to gather with other youth from Jewish and Muslim homes at the Islamic mosque in Berlin, CT. There was a sharing of food, of religious traditions, a sharing of prayer, a sharing of stories. It was a peace-making strategy right here in our own back yard. It may not have brought an immediate end to the tension in the Gaza Strip, but it was a step toward understanding, a step toward non-violence, a step toward peace. Wherever people, like our sixth graders, are willing to grow in understanding the other, that is where the mighty deeds of God are witnessed. If I were at a Palm Sunday parade, I'd be shouting, "Give peace a chance!"

A careful reading of the Palm Sunday story suggests this is a good model for our every Sunday worship. One person tells a story. Two persons recite original poems. Three people dance. We all sing a song. Everyone gets into the act of rejoicing in the mighty deeds of God!

Moving forward now from the loud parade of Palm Sunday toward Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Easter's dawn, I am aware of the rollercoaster ride, the mix of emotions; and I remain in the greatest of hope! Amen!