



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear Church Family,

In Acts, Jesus tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They have been in Jerusalem since Jesus' triumphal entry in Luke 19 on Palm Sunday. A passage in which the details (riding a colt, cloaks laid on the ground, disciples crying "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*") are Old Testament allusions that point to Jesus' Kingship. In Luke's account of Jesus birth, there are announcements and praise on the lips of angels and key prophetic characters that anticipate that Jesus will be given *the throne of his father David* (1:32) and be a great blessing for Israel and Jerusalem. One example is from Anna in 2:38 *And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.* So when the disciples ask Jesus in Acts, "*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" this is not a foolish expectation. Yet Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry is a muted celebration. It is only disciples who are rejoicing, not the whole crowd, and some of the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke his disciples. They are saying that what is happening is inappropriate and even blasphemous. Jesus' responds "*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*" Jesus is saying that it is entirely appropriate and all should be celebrating. He then weeps over the city, "*Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.*"

"*Hidden from your eyes*" reminds us of Isaiah 6, *hearing but never understanding...seeing but never perceiving.* This is what Stuart preached about last week, focusing on hearing. As he pointed out, Luke is very interested in the theme of people being unable to hear and perceive of who Jesus is and what he is about. Here at the triumphal entry we have religious leaders, the crowd and disciples all responding to Jesus differently. We looked at those three groups in Luke and how they were hearing and perceiving Jesus. But first we reviewed Luke's account of Jesus' rejection by his own hometown of Nazareth. Their initial response, *all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth,* changes and they are filled with wrath and try to kill him as a blasphemer. Why do they fail to perceive who he is? Because he denies their assumption that they can expect blessings and miracles from him since they are his own people. By citing the widow of Sidon and Namaan the Syrian, both Gentiles, Jesus is pointing out that God's purposes are sometimes fulfilled while the needs of His people Israel are not addressed. There were many widows and lepers in Israel who were not healed. Israel, as God's people, were always meant to be God's servants and be a blessing to the nations. The story of Jesus rejection of Nazareth suggests that Israel expected God to be their servant and rejected the role of servant themselves.

We might marvel at their blindness and extreme reaction. But we may share more with them than we care to admit. To what extent do we determine what is godly and what is not godly on the basis of what will be beneficial to us? As God's people, we too can understand that God is primarily about giving us blessings, aiding our fulfillment, and as His sons and daughters committed to our human flourishing. Therefore, that which appears to us to be good and fulfilling for our lives would be of Him and supported by Him. The idea that His purposes might be fulfilled in ways that do not address our own needs or desires is as anathema to us as it was to the townspeople of Nazareth. The Nazareth encounter should warn us that using the lens of personal fulfillment or flourishing is not a sound way to determine what is godly. As the story unfolds, it is the religious leaders (Pharisees, scribes and priests) who oppose Jesus. Although these groups were often in conflict with one another, they were aligned in their rejection of Jesus and who He claimed to be. Why are they not able to recognize Him? On the one hand, we do see in Luke that it is not easy to recognize what God is doing. Even John the Baptist is confused because Jesus is not what he

was expecting in a Messiah. However, the religious leaders have self-serving reasons for rejecting Jesus. The parable of the wicked tenants in Luke 20 is devastating. What is most damning in this parable is that the tenants recognize the son and kill him with the motivation of gaining ownership of the property. This is not a case of being unable to recognize the son, this is a case of rebellion. The religious leaders do not want to relinquish their authority and submit to Jesus. They are too preoccupied with maintaining their status. We too can have things hidden from our eyes, things that could make for peace in our lives, because we are reluctant to relinquish our rule over our lives to Jesus.

The crowd's allegiance is fickle so it is fitting that they are not praising him as he enters Jerusalem. They do respond to Jesus' ministry with great enthusiasm. And as the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities escalates, it is the favor of the crowd that protects Jesus. This is why the religious leaders persuade Judas to lead them to Jesus so he can be arrested away from the crowds. But after his arrest, the crowd is instrumental in calling for Jesus' crucifixion. Had they remained loyal to Jesus, Pilate would have let him go. The crowd turns on Jesus because they conclude that his treatment at the hand of his enemies indicates that he is not who he claimed to be. A true prophet of God would have used his power to vanquish his enemies when they tried to arrest him (like Elijah in 2 Kings 1). They reject a Jesus who appears weak and ally themselves with the religious leaders to crucify him. Reading this story of the crowd, do we see ourselves in their fickle allegiance to Jesus? Does our allegiance to Him wane if we are not experiencing Him as a powerful figure in the circumstances of our lives? Are we also reluctant to embrace power that is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:10) because we want the powerful victor who triumphs over his enemies?

What about the disciples? As we come into Acts from Luke, the idea that Jesus is going to leave the scene and turn the mission over to the disciples is disturbing. Throughout the gospel, the faithfulness and reliability of the disciples is inconsistent. And toward the end of the story, through Jesus' death and even with his resurrection, they model failure more than success. With Judas, it is shocking that one who walked so closely with Jesus would betray him. Peter's denial comes after Jesus says to his disciples, "*You are those who stayed with me in my trials.*" And Peter is not the only one who fails to do this. While the religious leaders and crowds are playing their roles in Jesus' trial and crucifixion, there is no mention of Jesus' disciples after the account of Peter's denial until after Jesus' death. They reappear in Acts 23:49 as *all of his acquaintances [who] stood at a distance watching.*

Also, on the Mount of Olives they fail to obey when called to *pray that you may not enter into temptation.* There is a marked contrast between Jesus being in agony and praying so earnestly that his sweat is like drops of blood and the disciples falling asleep. Like Jesus, they need to pray in order to be prepared for what is about to happen. And we are to understand that their failure to pray means that they are not prepared to respond to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. What are we unable to respond rightly and faithfully to in our lives because we are not spending enough time connecting to God in prayer?

Finally, they struggle to believe the news that Jesus has risen from the dead. And the reason they struggle is that they have failed to listen to Jesus. The angels tell the women at the tomb, "*Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.*" Jesus in fact told them this on three separate occasions. The women remembered and believed, but the disciples fail to remember. Had they heard those words and remembered them, they would have responded to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection very differently. We also get distracted and confused by adversity when we fail to hear and remember the words of Jesus and the Word in our lives. Stuart encouraged us to lead listening lives, hearing and responding to the word of God. In the book of Acts, the disciples are able to carry on Jesus' mission. Clearly, the baptism of the Holy Spirit made a huge difference. As we study Acts, may we be encouraged to lead listening lives and receive the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us witnesses to the presence of Jesus' kingdom.

Pastorally Yours,
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