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The Things that Make for Peace Luke 19:41-48

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July 19, 2015 – Trinity 7

Two words: “Jesus wept”. Together they’re the shortest verse in the Bible (John 11:35) and yet they speak volumes. Jesus wept, Jesus grieved, because he cares, because he loves. In John 11 he wept over the news that his friend Lazarus had died. It’s a remarkable thing. Jesus had already arrived at Lazarus’ home. Mary had just met him and Jesus had just asked her to take him to the tomb. Jesus knew what he was going to do. He knew that when he got there he was going to call Lazarus to rise up from death and to come out of the tomb. He knew how joyful and excited everyone would be when that happened. But Lazarus was dead. His friends were grieving. And Jesus grieved with them, because he loved them and because he cared. It grieved him to see them grieving even though he knew that it would all be better in a few minutes.

If Jesus could weep with the friends and family of Lazarus when he knew everything would soon be fine, imagine how he would weep over the coming judgement on Israel. Lazarus and his friends were disciples; they were men and women who had repented and embraced Jesus and his kingdom and how had become his friends. Most of Israel had done just the opposite. If Jesus could weep over the death of a saint who would soon be alive again, imagine how he might grieve over a whole people who were facing death with no hope. As we’ve made our way through the last ten chapters of Luke’s Gospel we’ve seen Jesus talking a lot about judgement. He’s told his disciples how he’s going to Jerusalem and that there he’ll not only be rejected, but murdered too. A

lot of people might gloat over the coming judgement. Most of the Jews waiting for the Messiah would have been gloating over the judgement they expected to come down on the Romans. But that’s not Jesus. That’s not why he came; that’s not his mission—not at all.

This morning we’ll be looking at Luke 19:41-48. Jesus weeps again.

Most of us are familiar with the story that Luke tells, but if we weren’t we might find it an odd time for Jesus to be weeping. Verse 41 follows verse 40 without a break. Jesus is in the middle of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He’s acting out the prophecy of Zechariah 9 where the people rejoice at the return of the Lord to Zion. Israel’s God had returned and Israel’s God is King. But he’s not a king like Caesar or like David. He’s not a revolutionary like Judas Maccabeus. He doesn’t ride in a chariot or on a warhorse; he comes to take his throne and he rides into Jerusalem in humility and on the back of a donkey.

The people didn’t really understand it all. As Jesus left Bethany or Bethphage on the donkey and crested the Mount of Olives, ready to travel down into the valley and back up the other side to Jerusalem, the disciples got the crowds started. They put their coats on the road in front of Jesus and started singing the words of Psalm 118: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Pretty soon the crowds of people travelling with Jesus joined in, putting down their coats too and waving palm branches. Before long new crowds were lining the road to see what was going on. Even though he didn’t look the part of the Messiah, the King, people saw Zechariah’s prophecy being fulfilled and joined in. They gave Jesus his royal entry into Jerusalem.

We can imagine Jesus cresting the Mount of Olives as the people cheered him on. Everyone was excited and happy. Everyone except Jesus. He

knew what his coming to Jerusalem meant. Even though the people were celebrating the coming of the King—the Day of the Lord—Jesus knew that it was going to be a day of darkness for them, not the day of light they expected. And then as the city came into view—first the temple high on Mount Zion, and then the rest of the city around it—Jesus broke into tears. Luke says in verse 41:

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it...

Why did Jesus weep over the city? Again, think of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus came to restore the creation that humanity had corrupted. Jesus came to deal with our sin—to provide a means of forgiveness, to provide a means of reconciliation between sinners and a holy God, and to restore his gift of life by giving us his indwelling Spirit. Jesus came to redeem us from our enemies—from sin and death—and in dying on the cross and rising from the grave—to conquer them. But that also means judgement on sin. Jesus came to redeem condemned humanity, but redemption can only come to those who repent: who turn away from *everything* and take hold of Jesus and only Jesus by faith. Those who refuse repentance, those who refuse Jesus, remain condemned and will face judgement. That’s why Jesus was weeping. He came to redeem, but as he came over the crest of the mountain he looked out over a city that he knew would reject him just as it had rejected the prophets. Even as he was surrounded by cheering crowds hailing him as King, he knew that only a few of them truly understood and only a few of them were ready to repent. Even as he saw the great temple on top of Mount Zion, he knew that it was in the control of priests and scribes and religious leaders who had invested themselves in a worldly system utterly opposed to the Lord and his kingdom. The Lord had given them a treasure as the king had given his servants their minas, but the religious leaders of Israel hadn’t just hidden that treasure

away for safe-keeping in a handkerchief; they had invested it in another kingdom and in a completely different set of priorities.

Through his sobs, Jesus speaks 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. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”
(Luke 19:42-44)

Jesus makes two indictments against Israel. First, they have not known the things that make for peace. Second, they did not know the time of their visitation. We'll come back to those in a minute, but first the consequences.

Jesus describes the city surrounded by enemies. They set up a “barricade” around the city—the Greek word describes military fortifications or earthworks setup for a siege or for a defensive position as the army prepare to make an attack. Enemies will surround Jerusalem on every side. There will be no escape and when the enemy is victorious, they will tear the city to pieces. The imagery goes back to Jesus' warning in 13:1-5. The Jewish men slaughtered by Pilate and the people on whom the Tower of Siloam had fallen were just a foretaste of the death and destruction that would come when the Romans would bring God's judgement on Jerusalem, on the temple, and on Israel. There on top of the mountain was Herod the Great's temple. It was built on solid rock, but the spiritual reality was that it had been built on sand. Think back to Jesus' parable of those two houses, one built on rock and the other on

sand. The first stood and the second fell. This is exactly what Jesus was getting at there.

And so we come back to Jesus' indictment. Think back to the prophetic song that Zechariah sang over Jesus as a baby in Chapter 1:

**“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”** (Luke 1:68-75)

Visitation, redemption, salvation, mercy, restoration. Israel missed all of this. Israel did not know the things that make for peace. Israel didn't recognise her visitation—she longed for the return of the Lord to Zion, but when he came in Jesus, she rejected him and crucified him. The Lord had redeemed Israel from Egypt, he'd given her a home, and he'd given her his law so that she could be a blessing to the nations—so that she could lead the pagan nations to the Lord that they might find peace and reconciliation, but Israel had rejected her mission. Circumcision was meant to be a sign of God's gracious election, but Israel turned it into sign of privilege. In the centuries following King David, she

prostituted herself to pagan gods and made alliances with pagan kings. She betrayed her covenant with the Lord and so he brought the Babylonians on Jerusalem in judgement. They destroyed the city and carried the people into exile. When Israel returned and rebuilt the temple she recommitted herself to the Lord. This time there were no pagan idols setup in the temple alongside the Lord's altar, but Israel, and especially her leaders and her priests, prostituted herself to the pursuit of wealth and nationalistic ambitions. She even reimagined the person of the Messiah around her new idols and corrupted religion and, as a result, when the Messiah came—when the Lord returned to visit his people—Israel missed it. She missed the time of her visitation, she missed her opportunity for salvation, and now she stands condemned. Before the generation alive that day passed away, judgement would come. As the Babylonians had come six-hundred years earlier to bring the Lord's judgement, so the Romans would come and leave no stone standing before driving the people into a permanent exile.

Why? Because the Lord cannot stand by as his covenant with his people is broken. The Lord will purify his people. Through Malachi he described his coming to the temple—his visitation of Israel and his return to Zion—as a day of judgement and purification:

The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in

the days of old and as in former years. (Malachi 3:1-4)

Sin will be judged, the wicked punished, and the faithful remnant redeemed and established. Jesus is now gathering this remnant, this new Israel, this new priesthood around himself, but he still weeps for the coming judgement. Sin must be punished, death must be conquered, but the Lord's ultimate desire is for repentance and restoration. The Lord does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23). And so Jesus weeps.

And after his royal entry into the city, Jesus makes his way to the temple. Luke telescopes the storyline. If we look at Mark's Gospel we see that after his triumphal entry into the city Jesus went back to spend the night in Bethany and then returned to the temple on Monday. But Luke compresses the story to make a point. Just as Jerusalem represented Israel and the Jewish people, the temple represented Jerusalem. And so Luke doesn't simply have Jesus entering the city; Jesus enters straight into the temple—into the heart of everything, in fact, into the very heart and soul of Israel. That's what the temple represented. And Luke says the humble King on the donkey now rises up in judgement on the heart of his people. Look at verses 45-46:

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

This is another acted out prophecy. Jesus is acting out the coming destruction that he was weeping over. We often think that Jesus was upset because there was buying and selling going on in the temple. Some of the moneychangers and vendors may well have been fleecing the poor, but the fact is that for the system of temple

sacrifices to take place people had to buy animals for the sacrifices. Buying and selling animals and changing money wasn't wrong in and of itself. The key to understanding what Jesus is upset about is this word "robbers". The Greek word doesn't refer to common thieves or even to the sort of people who would overcharge for a sparrow or a lamb. The same word is used to describe the thieves crucified with Jesus. It's also used to describe Barabbas, the violent revolutionary whom Pilate released instead of Jesus. These "robbers" were people who took from the poor with violence. Think of the men in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who waylaid the travelling man, beat him, and left him for dead. Barabbas was one of these sorts: a violent man seeking revolution and who was willing to rob and kill for his cause. The temple was supposed to be a house of prayer, but the chief priests, the scribes, the religious leaders—the Sanhedrin—had turned it into a den of robbers. Think of a mountain hideout where violent revolutionaries and thieves run to escape from the law. That's what the temple has become. The temple—the heart of Israel—had become horribly corrupt.

Jesus is acting out the prophecy of Jeremiah 11:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

"Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? ...And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. (Jeremiah 11:3-11, 13-15)

The temple had become a symbol of the rebellion and sins of Israel. The people came and the priests cried out "Peace! Peace!", but there was no peace. Israel had no understanding of the things that bring peace. Israel was to be a light to the nations and the temple was to be a shining beacon in the middle of it, but instead Israel did the opposite. She condemned the nations and the temple became the symbol of her nationalistic hopes for the downfall of the nations. Israel's priorities were the opposite of the Lord's priorities and so, like the servants of the king in the parable, when Jesus came they declared: We do not want this man to rule over us!

And all of this because the temple was no longer a house of prayer. Had the temple been a house of prayer the people would never have forgotten the priorities of the kingdom and of the Lord's covenant. Had the temple been a house of prayer all along, Israel would have known the things that bring peace and she would have

recognised the Lord when he returned to Zion in Jesus. Prayer—*real* prayer—involves the persistent pursuit of justice as we saw in the parable of the widow who refused to give up seeking justice from the judge. Real prayer involves humility before God and others as Jesus described in the tax collector who stood at the back of the temple with his eyes on the floor praying: “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” These are the things that make for peace. These are the things on which the kingdom of God is built. But without prayer—true prayer—Israel took to oppressing the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. She stole, murdered, committed adultery, and swore falsely. And all the while the priests and the scribes and the religious leaders absolved them from their “den of robbers”. The heart of Israel had become corrupt through lack of prayer. And so the temple has to go. Jesus acts out now what will happen in forty years.

And so Jesus acts out the coming judgement as he drives the merchants from the temple and shouts the words of Jeremiah. The religious leaders were angry. Jesus was upsetting their world. Many of them no doubt feared he was going to bring the wrath of the Romans down on them if he stirred up too much trouble. They wanted him gone, but the people loved him. In verses 47-48 Luke writes:

And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Brothers and sisters, The Lord had promised through Ezekiel:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

The old temple was a temple of stone. The new temple is a temple of flesh, established by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Jesus’ people. The old temple had failed and God caused it to be swept away forever by the Romans. And now we—you and I—are the covenant people with the heart of flesh. We are the people indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are the people given the life of Jesus. The Church, wherever her people live and work and worship, is the temple of the Lord.

But we need to ask if we are a house of prayer, truly living the way of peace that Jesus brought, or have we become a den of robbers? Like Israel, have we confused the Good News that Jesus is Lord—a message we’ve been given and called to carry to the nations—have we confused it with our own nationalistic, patriotic, and political agendas? Like Israel in the days of Jeremiah, have we compromised our worship of God with divided loyalties? They setup altars to pagan gods in the temple. Too often we setup altars to security and wealth in our hearts. Israel oppressed the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow; she stole and murdered and swore falsely, but thought she could come to the temple for absolution without repentance. How often do we do the same sorts of things? On a big scale we often support the agendas of our governments that make enemies of the very people to whom we should be taking the Good News—letting politics blind us to the fact that sin and death are the common enemies of humanity. We play along with economic policies that dishonestly debase our money and that place obscene loads of debt on our children and grandchildren, that make the rich richer and defraud the poor. And on a small scale, how often do we simply ignore or even avoid opportunities to manifest Jesus to the people around us? How often do we reach out to help the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow? I think most of us are

more inclined to ignore them and to hope that someone else will help. Jesus calls us to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who abuse us. I think we’re more inclined to hate those who hate us. And yet Jesus points us in the right direction with that command: Pray for those who abuse you. Prayer—real and true prayer—was what was missing from Israel. Prayer for justice, for mercy, for grace, for humility and prayer that leads to *action*—to doing justice, mercy, grace, and humility—that’s the kind of prayer that leads the people of God to the heart of God. And Brothers and Sisters, that’s the sort of prayer we should be praying and living and doing. It’s the prayer of a people who have been given a heart of flesh, a heart after God’s own heart, and who are indwelt by God’s own Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, as we acknowledged earlier in the Collect, you are the author and giver of all good things. We ask again that you would graft into our hearts a love for your name, that you would increase in us true religion, and that you would nourish us with all that is good. Your Son, Jesus, has redeemed us from our bondage to sin and has given us life in your Spirit. By your mercy, keep us in that life. Make us, your church, a house of prayer—real, true, doing prayer that draws us closer to you and that manifests to the world that Jesus is Lord. We ask this through him. Amen.