

**"Lessons Learned"**  
**Luke 19:29-40**  
**Palm Sunday**  
**April 14, 2019**

Jesus on Palm Day rode into Jerusalem with confidence, sure of who he was, what he claimed, and what he was to be about. He directed his disciples with authority. He rode upright, allowing the people to pave the way for him with their coats and to touch his as he rode by. How did he find the courage? Surely, he knew he was riding into danger. Certainly, he knew he was drawing attention from those who would destroy him. This final journey of his to the holy city was a far cry from what the devil had offered him in the wilderness. Hear what the Spirit is saying to us in Luke's Gospel, at Chapter 19, beginning with verse 29:

*After saying these things, Jesus headed straight up to Jerusalem. When he got near Bethphage and Bethany at the mountain called Olives, he sent off two of the disciples with instructions: "Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you'll find a colt tethered, one that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says anything, asks, 'What are you doing?' say, 'His Master needs him.'"*

*The two left and found it just as he said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said, "What are you doing untying the colt?"*

*They said, "His Master needs him."*

*They brought the colt to Jesus. Then, throwing their coats on its back, they helped Jesus get on. As he rode, the people gave him a grand welcome, throwing their coats on the street.*

*Right at the crest, where Mount Olives begins its descent, the whole crowd of disciples burst into enthusiastic praise over all the mighty works they had witnessed:*

*Blessed is he who comes,  
the king in God's name!  
All's well in heaven!  
Glory in the high places!*

*Some Pharisees from the crowd told him, "Teacher, get your disciples under control!"*

*But he said, "If they kept quiet, the stones would do it for them, shouting praise."*

Here ends the lesson. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Jesus in the wilderness was cold, hungry, and lonely. There he was not a king. There no one gave up their coat for him. There in the wilderness it was just him and the devil. Jesus was naked against the bright armor and flashing smile of the wily one, Ole Slick. Remember him?

Jesus in the wilderness is you and me, wiping our tears and runny noses on our hands, alone this Lenten season as we face the brutally cold winds of our private realities as they meet us square in the eyes.

Did Jesus mutter to the angels, "I am not good enough! I can't go through with this. It's just too hard to look at myself and my demons, especially when I don't have any of my defenses in line."

Did Jesus cry out to the rocks and trees, "Why are you silent in my time of need? Don't you care that I am practically dying out here? I need shelter and you keep me at bay with your thorns. I need shade and you rob me of it too soon each day. I need warmth at night, but your leaves do not wrap me in comfort; instead they curl up away from me as though I am some kind of a pariah."

Did Jesus pray to his Creator, "Why me? Why do you put these tests before me? Isn't it enough that I call you Abba, that I devote myself to you, that I go before you in the presence of the enemy preaching your love and justice?"

Did Jesus say to his demons, "Get away from me! I don't want to play your game. I am not strong enough to face my inner voices. I am afraid and I am feeling weak against you."

I wonder.

This Lent, we have wandered with Jesus in and out of his wilderness journey. We have heard the devil tempt Jesus with those thoughts that had already hooked him. Like you and me, Jesus has struggled through Lent with feelings of empowerment on the one hand and complete helplessness on the other. Jesus has been tempted to eat from the poisonous tree of imagined greatness, of immortality, of invincibility. These are false illusions for him as surely as they are for us.

We think we are invincible until we are diagnosed with an incurable disease. We think we are immortal until someone who seemed like the very rock of ages to us dies. We take life for granted until our grandchild is born 12 weeks early and struggles each day in the NICU to claim his very next tentative day on this earth.

We think we cannot expire of hunger until we cannot keep down any food, so sick is our stomach. We think our friend cannot ever leave us until he announces he is moving clear across the country. We think we are financially secure until we divorce, and our assets are consumed by the legal system and the dividing of the household. We think we live in the safest country in the world until suicide rocks a high school or a Boeing aircraft crashes into the ground or domestic violence shatters our sense of security. We think we are popular enough at school until someone posts an unflattering picture of us on Instagram and our entire world comes tumbling down. We think our kids are healthy and well-adjusted until one of them is caught at school with heroin in his pocket and he challenges, "What's the big deal?"

Jesus is us and we are Jesus in the wilderness. The devil is the only constant. That and the angels. For weeks now we have faced off against the devil, against those demons that haunted Jesus and the ones of our own making who follow us around day and night. Last week, we called on our angels to give us hope and love and connection in a world sometimes sorely lacking any of these qualities.

We heard of pets who have left us weeping and grandparents who left us alone but equipped in the world, of good Samaritans who just happened to find us stranded on the proverbial side of the road, of surgeons who have given us the good news we have fervently prayed for, of devoted wife/partners of half-centuries, of kids who struggle and in their troubles make us better mothers, and of friends who show us the face of God in how they care for us when we cry out or maybe just when they sense that we need them.

Jesus didn't just happen to gallivant into Jerusalem all confident and committed that Palm Day. We don't claim our place in the world by accident or birthright. He lived through hell in that wilderness-- literally-- and don't try to tell me that we all have lived through anything less in our own lives.

Yet, here we stand. Here we stand as the Body of Christ. Here we welcome new persons into our church family, and on Palm Day as our children wing and parade, we tell them on their first official day as one of us, "You are our wilderness angels come to tend to us, and we are yours, too." We say to Allie and Christy, to Sharon and Laurie, to Randy and Tom, and to Ralph and Steve, "Bring us your tired selves, your poor souls, you huddling masses yearning to break free. We welcome you into this communion of saints, and we are eager to learn from you and to love you just as you come to us."

When we welcome Karen and Robert Graham's family today after the loss of their patriarch Keith, we say, "Come here and find care and comfort in the collective arms of people who hear about your inestimable loss and are moved to tears alongside you, with those who are just glad you are here together as family in your grief and your sadness. Feel our love."

Along with our Jesus, we stumble through the wilderness days, blind and lost. We emerge again knowing ourselves better for the lessons we have learned. We endure our devilish wilderness experiences and on the other side, we reach for our loved ones and our friends, our living angels who will help us get the nourishment and life-giving water we desperately need.

We live through the wilderness time and then we are ready to mount our colts and ride into Jerusalem with Jesus. We wander through the season of Lent learning about ourselves, and then we are ready to meet the promise of Easter. Along the way there are trials and tribulations, crosses to bear, and deaths to face. It gives a whole new meaning to the resurrection, doesn't it?

*May It Be So.*