

“Palms and Parades”  
March 25, 2018  
Palm/Passion Sunday  
Mary Gause

Luke 19:28-40

- 28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
- 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples,
- 30 Saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.
- 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”
- 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.
- 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”
- 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.”
- 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.
- 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.
- 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,
- 38 Saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”
- 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”
- 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

A few years ago, we made our first family pilgrimage to Disney World. By our family, I mean Bill and I, our then 11-year-old son Will Grey and our then 8-year-old son Harry. Some of you may not have ever met Harry. Harry is on the autism spectrum and while he is always here on Sunday mornings, he tends to spend time at “his church” back in the preschool area along with one of his therapists/sitters. Harry struggles with large crowds, loud noises and overstimulation which is magnified simply by being in an enclosed space like the sanctuary. So why then, you might ask yourself, would two seemingly bright and competent parents take their autistic child to what just may be the overstimulation capital of the world? Well, in one word, Goofy! Goofy, that silly fun loving dog friend of Mickey Mouse who moves at a bit slower pace and looks at the world a bit differently. Goofy is one of Harry’s very favorite characters. Add to it that Will Grey had been asking to visit the magical

world about every year since the age of four, and face it - there really is no place quite like Disney. So, we caved-in and we went. We planned our trip very carefully using other special needs blogs, plotting out the “quiet” rooms that are carefully tucked away throughout Disney just for those with sensory issues. We had a great week making sure we pushed hard in the morning, took breaks in the afternoon, and went back for shorter nighttime activities. And on our final night, we made special plans to attend the “Mickey’s not so Scary Halloween.” This special ticket event makes for smaller crowds and special trick-or-treat events all culminating in a grand night time all-lit up Disney parade. It would be the grand finale to our trip!

On Friday night, we pushed through a week’s worth of exhaustion and went back to the park. The decorations were amazing, characters costumed in fun Halloween ways and Disney hosts were spread throughout the park serving special tricks and treats. We rode a few rides, visited a few trick-or-treat sites and then it started to sprinkle, and that sprinkled quickly became a downpour. Parade time came but the rain



*Figure 1: "Drenched and frustrated" Bill and boys before parade*

continued, and continued, and continued. Harry and Will Grey were growing impatient, their parents increasingly frustrated and we almost gave up and went home. Finally, about an hour after parade time, a park employee walked in front of us unrolling the tell-tale yellow rope that created the parade line. And five minutes later, the lights dimmed, the music started and the parade began.

It was grand fun with Winnie the Pooh and Tigger and Piglet wearing special masks; the caretakers from the Haunted Mansion doing a special choreographed routine complete with real shovel dragged in tempo and unison on the ground which created sparks that lit up on the street. Characters from all Disney shows, movies, and events were riding floats or walking in front of you. The music was contagious, and the parade was a 20 minute stream of character after dance routine after float after musical number all with special costumes and lighting that did not disappoint. I looked at the faces of our children with smiles and wide eyes taking it all



*Figure 2: Harry yelling, "Goofy!"*

in. And then, something changed. The music shifted yet again and around the corner came a huge float bearing an enormous gumball machine and right in the center was a large bicycle being ridden by none other than Goofy.

I quickly turned to look at Harry sitting on top of Bill’s shoulders and snapped this photo. This is Harry, our minimally verbal 8-year-old son, bouncing on Bill’s shoulders, clapping his hands and yelling, “Goofy! Goofy! Goofy!” The smile bigger than any I have ever seen on my child. His face was full of sheer, unbridled joy! That exhausted, and drenched child was transformed by the arrival of one of his favorite Disney friends.

When I read our Luke text for this morning, I could not help but think about a parade. About the gathered crowds, the building excitement, and the way it draws people together into a common cause. I am sure for the people experiencing Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, it was exciting. It is one of the events that all four gospel writers record at the beginning of Holy Week, yet each version is slightly different. Luke’s version of this parade contains many significant details that probably escape us when they are read in light of our typical remembrance of this festival celebration; details that help us understand a bit more about Palm Sunday – a bit more about Passion Sunday – and the grand entrance we make into Holy Week.

Grand entrance processions were a norm of the time and the Roman Empire loved a grand parade. Their parades usually began with their general or some dignitary riding in on a great warhorse followed in procession of his troops and then throngs of people singing his praises. Then the great parade would end at the temple devoted to that great dignitary where all would give thanks to their god for their amazing fortune and they would have a big celebratory feast.

Luke’s version of this triumphal entry into Jerusalem has Jesus riding in on a donkey – a young, simple, domesticated donkey. Not a warhorse, but a workhorse; not followed by a finely tuned, war-ready army, but by an unarmed, hodge-podge group of disciples. An odd choice by the day’s standards. But, isn’t that precisely the point?

Through Jesus’ dramatic entry, He makes clear, one more time, this IS the King they have searched for; He IS the Messiah they had hoped and waited for. Jesus is stating yet again that Jesus’ kingship was not the type that ruled with violence and money and power. No, this king brought the message of love and peace to all, particularly those without. Ultimately, Jesus’ triumphal entry was one last attempt to help the people see Jesus was the Messiah written about in the Scriptures. He was the one that God had promised them. And for a moment, it seems the people get it!

Those gathered to witness Jesus’ entry begin to lay their coats on the road, at the feet of the donkey. In other gospels, they use palm branches and sticks but Luke intentionally talks about coats. The people taking off their outer garments and laying them at the feet of the donkey to cushion the pathway for the King. For Luke, this is a symbolic move. Much like palm branches are symbols of victory to the Roman Empire, one’s outer garment was a method of determining one’s social class; one’s status. The inner garments were often of similar

colors regardless of social standing, but the outer garment came in a multitude of colors and styles which spoke of one’s occupation and social standing. <sup>1</sup>

In a spontaneous act, people were moved to spread their cloaks on the road. People did not come bringing piles of coats that they could methodically lay them out at the feet of Jesus. They did not run home to find an old coat. They were the coats from their very own backs that they willingly removed in order to lay them upon the dirty ground. They didn’t think about the donkey with questionable bathroom habits that would walk across them. Or about the multitude of people and animals that pass through the same gates daily with little regard for what they leave behind on the road. No, the crowd was so moved by Jesus that they began to throw down whatever they had to show their honor and praise for the King. Those gathered gave without restraint and with little regard to what might happen later.<sup>2</sup>

Now, I’ll be the first to acknowledge that this type of moved-in-the-moment thinking can get you into a lot of trouble. And I’m not endorsing that we go out and approach everything in our lives without restraint. But the actions of the crowd gathered at the entrance to Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday do tell us something. They modeled what it means to follow Jesus. Those gathered in the crowd acted with an unbridled devotion to their King. They acted with an unbridled devotion to Jesus Christ. They certainly did not know what all that meant but, for a moment, they knew this is our King.

Had they thought about that road and what was on it, some of them probably would have decided not to throw their coats. Had they thought about the potential loss of their coat or garment, they probably wouldn’t have thrown their coat. Had they thought about those who might be watching and what might happen by showing such support to Jesus, they probably wouldn’t have thrown their coat. These followers were swept-up in the amazing power of who Jesus was and they threw caution to the wind. Isn’t this what a life of discipleship is to be? Aren’t we are called to follow with that same unbridled devotion?

When we insist on being guided by reason, on figuring-out just how far we should go, and just when it might get difficult, we usually come to the conclusion that it is safer to not go so far.<sup>3</sup> And most of the time reason is a good thing. It is reason that stops us from putting our hand on a hot stove; it is reason that tells us not to let someone who has been drinking too much drive; it is reason that reminds us that not doing our work results in losing our job.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/ISBE/ID/2802/Dress.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Interpreter’s Bible Commentary; Luke. Abingdon Press. pg. 337.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

But reason can work in reverse too. Reason can stop us from trying something new. Reason can move us to justify “it just wouldn’t be important to that many people.” Reason tells us it is unlikely there really is a God or Jesus or Holy Spirit because we can’t see them. Reason tries to convince us there was no resurrection because, well, “there were bones” or “there were no bones.” Reason can convince us to stop following Jesus with our whole hearts

But in matters of discipleship, when we CHOOSE to follow Jesus, we can’t lean on reason. Discipleship calls for unbridled devotion. Discipleship calls for unbridled faith; the art of believing in something without tangible, physical proof. Discipleship calls for us to answer and act with our whole selves trusting and knowing that God’s way is THE way for us even when it seems so very counter to what the world is pushing. That unbridled passion of discipleship pushes us to make Sunday mornings a priority. It pushes us to pray. It pushes us to use our best efforts to forgive, to love and to trust in ways that the world says are only for the foolish.

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week, this Sunday in Lent that kicks-off our remembrance of the last week of Jesus’ earthly life. From Palm Sunday to the Last Supper and arrest of Maundy Thursday, through the trial and crucifixion of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday and culminating next Sunday with the grand Easter celebration of an empty tomb. Who does that? Who celebrates a week like this? We do! For Christians, this week is one packed with mystery and questions and lots of emotion. It is a week that calls forth precisely that unbridled devotion. For when the questions arise of “What really happened?” And, “Why did God choose this way?” And, “There is no way this could have really happened.” When those questions arise, we can wrestle with them knowing that ultimately it is about God and Jesus and the amazing power of God’s unbridled devotion and love for us that doesn’t eliminate the questions and doubts but surrounds them with the knowledge that somehow and in some way the love of God will reign supreme for all God’s people. We know something those on that first Palm Sunday did not – we know Easter Sunday comes!

As we enter this Holy week, may we do so with unbridled devotion. May we throw our faith and trust yet again behind the God who comes to shatter the norms of our time, yet again, and may we live our lives as disciples with unbridled devotion. May we all find ourselves swept up in the joy and the hope that our brothers and sisters felt so many years ago and be moved into actions that show the same unbridled love and devotion for Jesus. For Jesus has certainly shown time and time again, that deep, unbridled love and devotion he has for all of us!

May peace be with you this week and always. Amen.