

## Look at Jesus

Luke 19:28-40

Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022

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I don't know what your experience has been like with Christians, but I would suspect that in a room like this, there are some of you who haven't had very good experiences with Christians. You've spent enough time around them, and maybe you haven't been impressed. You have some stories you could tell, and they wouldn't be pretty. Maybe you've been hurt, disappointed, wounded even.

I don't know what your experience has been like with the Church, but I would suspect that in a room like this, there are some of you who haven't had very good experiences with the Church. You've spent enough time around (or in) them, and I wouldn't be surprised if you've seen some pretty confusing stuff. I'm sure many of you have stories you could tell. Maybe the Church has hurt, disappointed, or even wounded you.

And if that's you – if your experience with Christians or with Churches has been mixed at best and painful at worst – then maybe you're not sure what to make of all of this, this morning. Maybe it's hard for you to focus. Maybe that's because you haven't always liked what you've seen.

So come back to Jesus. Focus on him. Behold his courage, his sacrifice, his power, his tenderness, his kindness, his brilliance, himself. Not sure where to look? Look at Jesus. Not sure where to focus? Focus on him. Come back, this morning. Come back to Jesus.

I want to say something to every person in this room today. You may be eight years old, you may be 80 years old. You might come to church every Sunday, you might avoid church as much as possible. I know most of you, but I don't know all of you, but I know all of us have something in common, and it's that we've seen enough in our lifetimes to know that the church isn't perfect. Things go wrong. Sometimes really wrong. And it's heartbreaking.

And what I want to say is this: Look at Jesus. Focus on him. Ignore everything else if you have to. Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Jesus Christ. Because he'll never fail you. And he'll never hurt you. And he'll never abandon you. And you can always trust him.

How do we know this? How can we really know this? Well it's not by focusing on other Christians. And it's not by focusing on the Church. It's by focusing on Jesus.

Over this next week – over Holy Week – beginning today and ending next Sunday on Easter – we see everything we'd ever need to see to prove to us that Jesus deserves to be our focal point. And that, by making him our focal point, by putting him – and his death, and his resurrection – at the very center of our lives – we are forever secure.

It's only Jesus who gives us this security. It's only Jesus who demonstrates perfect love. It's only Jesus who puts his money where his mouth is, and willingly rides into Jerusalem (where he knows there's a price on his head) and says "Here I am! Look at me! I come to bring peace. I come to die. And I come to rise again". Jesus says, go ahead, kill me. I know what's coming. I know what I was sent here to this earth to do. I know the evil plans and evil schemes to take me down and shut me up. So here I am! And here we go. And here is where we see everything we'd ever need to see. Look at Jesus.

I'd like for us to briefly consider two things we see when we look at him in our Palm Sunday drama, and the first thing we see is **Jesus in command**.

If you have a bible, look with me at Luke 19, and we'll start in verse 29:

<sup>29</sup>When (Jesus) drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"

Jesus is not a bystander in the events of Holy Week. Jesus is in command of the events of Holy Week. He is the star of the drama, and the director of the drama. He is the protagonist of the story, and the author of the story.

And this is made evident to us even in such details as Jesus telling his disciples to go get him a colt, a young male donkey. And Jesus' command of even such a detail as that extends to him knowing where the colt is tied, and knowing that the colt had never been ridden before.

This isn't someone who's surprised by anything that's happening. This is someone who knows everything that's happening.

And he knows there's a price on his head. John 11:57 tells us that:

“...the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.”

He knew this.

Eyes wide open to what awaits him, Jesus directs his disciples to go, untie a donkey, tell its owners that “the Lord has need of it”, and instead of sneaking into Jerusalem under cover of darkness, he would ride in to shouts of “Hosanna!” Jesus comes in, right through the front door of the house.

Jesus is in full command. Keep this in the back of your mind this Holy Week as we journey together to the cross and to the empty tomb. He knows where the donkey is. He knows who his betrayer is. He knows there will be a boy carrying a jar of water. He knows there will be a furnished upper room there. He knows how Peter will fail him. He knows the exact timing of a rooster crowing. He knows that he will die! And he knows he'll rise again in three days.

Look at this Jesus! Focus on him! He deserves to be your focal point. He has proved that he is Lord. Jesus in command.

The second thing we see when we look at him this morning, is Jesus in the center.

<sup>37</sup> As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Jesus is at the center of the triumphal entry. Fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy from half a century earlier.

Jesus is at the center of the last supper. Fulfilling, in his body and blood, the promises of the Passover.

Jesus is at the center of the sham trial they put him on. Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of a “lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, he (opens) not his mouth.”

And Jesus hangs on the center cross. Fulfilling, by his perfect life and atoning death, all that the law required, all the punishment our sin deserved, and all of the forgiveness that we could never earn but is now so freely given because of him.

At every turn of every story, from the garden of Eden, to Noah's Ark. From the sacrifice of Isaac, to Israel's deliverance at the red sea. From manna in the dessert to water from a rock. From God's promises to Israel, to his promises through the prophets. From the young men in the fiery furnace to Jonah in the belly of the whale. And from the manger, to a donkey, to a cross, to a grave, and to his glorious ascension to his Father's right hand. Jesus is at the center of it all.

The writer of the book of Hebrews says it this way, about the supremacy of God's Son:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Several months ago I spent the better part of a Wednesday in an emergency room. There was a family in crisis, and I was privileged to be with them as they walked through it. And as I walked through the hallways that day, and late into the night, wearing my clergy shirt and clergy collar, I ended up having four different conversations and times of prayer with people I had never met, who were on beds in the hallway, and who reached out to me because they could tell I was a priest.

One was there for alcohol poisoning. Two for attempted suicide. Another was one of the spouses. And I can't tell you how grateful I was – in all of those conversations and prayers – to know for CERTAIN that Jesus was there with me, and with them, and that he was worth looking to. He was worth crying out to. That he could save these people. And I knew that because Jesus is always in command, and Jesus is always in the center.

That's what we're reminded of this morning.

We don't gather here on Palm Sunday, or this coming Maundy Thursday or Good Friday or Easter Sunday to commemorate past historical events. We gather this morning, and this coming Thursday and Friday and Easter Sunday and every Sunday to exalt and celebrate and praise and worship and proclaim that Jesus saves – Jesus lives – and Jesus keeps on saving – and keeps on living – and so we can keep on living – because he keeps on saving.

Blessed be our King who came to save. Our King who came to die. Our king who come to rise again. Our King who lives forever, and ever, and ever, and who reigns over all things, and who continues to be in command over all things. And our King, in whom we can trust when it seems like there are so few other people we can trust. Our King who is sure, when so much else seems unsure. Our Victorious King who died, and rose, and who lives again, and who is the Lord of the Church. The Center of the Church – and the center of the universe.

In Christ alone, my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song. This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease, my comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe. This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save. Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. For every sin on him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground, his body lay, light of the world, by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again. And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me. For I am his, and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry, to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand. Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Don't know where to look? Look at Jesus. Don't know where to focus? Focus on him. He will never leave you, he will never disappoint you, he will never hurt you, and he will never let you go.

So today, and this Holy Week, look at Jesus. Focus on him.