

Walking into the Footsteps of Jesus (Luke 19: 29-41 Philipians 2:1-11)

*When April with her showers sweet with fruit
The drought of March has pierced to the root...
And the Zephyr winds with their warm breath
Have greened and floralled every hill and heath...
and the small birds sing throughout the night
In courageous answer to love's demands
Then do folk long to go on pilgrimages,
And **Palmers to seek strange lands.** (modern paraphrase)*

Thus begins Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales about a group of very irreligious springtime pilgrims who pass the time as they ride along to Canterbury Cathedral by telling mostly bawdy stories for each other's amusement. But the phrase I wanted you to hear was that line about "**palmers seeking strange lands.**" For strangely enough those "palmers" took their name from these palms lying here at the base of this cross. And their proudly wearing of that title for the rest of their lives is a classic example of how we humans can completely miss the point of a lesson because we have focused on something secondary to the real meaning, like walking in the footsteps rather than into the footsteps of Jesus. Let me explain.

By the early Middle Ages people had forgotten about the Roman custom of taking a vacation. Life was so harsh that very few could take any time-off from their labors. But thanks to the Crusades bringing in new knowledge and the Bubonic plague greatly reducing the population, the standard of living for the survivors was greatly raised. So by Chaucer's day even farmers and merchants had the money, time, and inclination to take a holiday. But needing some justification for these excursions, they called vacationing "*going on a pilgrimage.*" And while these pilgrimages often did go to a religious location, most of what was done along the way was not very religious in nature, for these pilgrims were more often tourists looking for a good time, rather than their own spiritual improvement.

And Chaucer's pilgrims were a perfect example of these not-so-religious pilgrimages. He first met this group having such a rowdy good time in a local bar, that both he and bar's owner decided to join them for the rest of their journey.



Now, about those PALMERS: while most pilgrimage (holidays) usually stayed in country, a lucky, wealthy, few traveled all the way to the Holy land. **To be in Jerusalem for Holy**

Week; to wave palms on Sunday, and then to walk the Via Dolorosa – in the very footsteps of Jesus – on Good Friday, is still to this day the ultimate of all pilgrimage experiences. These privileged few would then return home proudly wearing on their tunic little crosses made of Palm branches, along with various other sacred relics, which today we call souvenirs. Thus these “Palmer’s” earned a lifetime of religious and social prestige just for doing the medieval equivalent of a trip to Euro Disney World. And those Palm crosses they wore were the first version of a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt.

People have not changed that much through the ages, spring fever has always come along with the spring and it generally makes some people want to wander and play but others to fight. Even in Palestine, **spring is the natural time for false pilgrimages and real violence.** Because anywhere large party crowds gather, the situation can easily get out of hand -- whether it is Spring Break on Daytona Beach or what was happening in Jerusalem when Jesus arrived for the Passover festival.

Everyone who could, came to Jerusalem for Passover and like the Canterbury Pilgrims, this was as much for the festivities as the religious experience. But since this particular springtime celebration also commemorated the Hebrews’ divine deliverance from earlier oppressors - and Palestine was now chafing under Roman occupation – Passover in Jerusalem was a prime time for political unrest. The crowds were unstable and easily roused. Both the Roman and Jewish officials were justifiably nervous, remembering that 35 years earlier there had been a bloody Passover Revolt. And now this radical Rabbi, Jesus - who had from birth been dubbed the “king of the Jews” - was headed into town with a large noisy crowd following him!

Unfortunately, no matter what he said, there were always those who would interpret Jesus’ every step with a political agenda; which perhaps even explains Judas’ motives for his betrayal; he didn’t want Jesus to die... he wanted to force his hand into bringing on the revolution.



But the officials need not have feared this palm waving crowd that lined Jesus’ path into town. These were probably just good-hearted people, in-town and looking for some excitement, so a parade was just what they wanted. And knowing Jesus, they wanted to honor him as best as they knew how even while misunderstanding what he was really up to. Some laid their cloaks in the road while others cut palms and brush to carpet Jesus’ approach. Everyone was

shouting "*Hosanna blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.*" But as Philip reminded you last week, they had the wrong king in mind, the wrong Messiah, and they were looking for the wrong kind of peace!

It is conceivable that, other than Jesus, no one – not even his disciples – knew what was really going on here. Jesus had often tried to explain to them why he must go to Jerusalem – to die - but they were too concerned with their own personal status to grasp what he was saying. And if the Disciples were confused, who else had a chance of understanding that Jesus' kingship and power was totally at odds with the expected way of doing things. While the crowds drew upon their memories of the warrior king David to understand this new coming "Messiah," Jesus followed the truth embodied in prophecies of the "Suffering Servant" as described by Isaiah.

The "suffering servant" Messiah would be the One who came not to conquer but to redeem, not to destroy or overthrow but to bind up and heal. He would show his strength not in the size of legions commanded or armaments displayed, but in patient and forgiving love. How difficult it would be for Jerusalem to understand that message love and forgiveness, particularly in the midst of their oppression under Roman rule. **So all that the Pharisees and Priests could see in Jesus was an arrogant and politically dangerous person who was coming to town at just the wrong time.**

But, there is an obvious question we need to ask of Jesus. Having up till now mostly stayed out in the country in order to avoid Jerusalem, and having purposely walked away from such earlier displays of mass adoration, and even trying his best to disperse the large crowds of late, why did Jesus now allow this spectacle of misunderstanding to happen?

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

For two simple reasons: **first** to fulfill prophecy, presenting himself as Israel's peaceful king, whether or not they could see it. And **second** to force the Jewish leaders to act. For they had hoped to secretly arrest and kill Jesus before the Passover, but God had ordained that his Son be slain on Passover as "*the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* (Mark 14:1-2, John 1:29, 1 Cor.5:7)"

And what was Jesus doing while this spectacle of misunderstood rejoicing was going on all around him? According to verses 41- 42 **he was weeping!** Weeping over that city full of mis-led pilgrims, saying "*if you had recognized even on this day the things that make for*

peace." So entrenched were they in their own interpretations and expectations of Jesus that they failed to *"recognize the time of (their) visitation from God.* Just like Chaucer's pilgrims, that first Palm Sunday crowd missed the point of their Messiah's pilgrimage to Jerusalem – let us not make that same mistake today!

Vacations are one thing and well worth taking, to get **away** from the daily routine, but vacations are not pilgrimages which are meant to be spiritual journeys **towards** a more Christ-like self through the discipline of travel. **Indeed our whole Christian life is meant to be a form of pilgrimage, for whether or not we ever get to Jerusalem to walk in the footsteps of Jesus we are always meant to be walking into the footsteps of Jesus wherever we go.** What Jesus would have of us is not that we throw palms on the road in front of him – but that we take his mindset for our own.

Which brings me to one of my favorite passages in the Bible: **Philippians 2:5-11.** *Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.* To have the mind of Jesus, this my friends is a better quest than any "holy grail," a better souvenir than any palm brought from Jerusalem. In the pilgrimage of our life we are to be walking **into** the footsteps of Jesus. To be taking on his way of thinking and acting. And how do we achieve this transformation? **Philippians gives us four steps for getting into the mind of Christ: submission, service, sacrifice, and worship.**

The first step into the mind of Christ is submission, meaning to "think of others – more than we think of ourselves." According to verses 4 - 6. Jesus was in all ways like God, but thought that such equality was not something he selfishly needed to hang on to. As part of the triune Godhead, Jesus did not need anything; he had all the glory and praise in heaven; together with the Father and Holy Spirit, Jesus ruled the universe! **What could prompt him to leave that? The answer is love and submission.** The Father's love for the lost world and his submission to the one painful plan that could restore it. As we walk into the footsteps of Jesus, we are expected to become less selfish and grasping and more "other-centered."

We expect unsaved people to be selfish and grasping, but we do not expect this of Christians who have experienced the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1-2). More than twenty times in the New Testament, God instructs us how to live with "one another." We are to prefer one another (Rom. 12:10), build up one another (1 Thes. 5:11), and bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2). **Others** is the key word in the vocabulary of the Christian who is learning Jesus' submissive mind. Why did Jesus make the very lonely pilgrimage to earth? For the love of us and in hopes of saving us. Jesus was thinking of others and not himself – *let this mind be in you.*

And because of this love for others, verse 7 tells us that Jesus willingly **submitted** to His Father's plan, emptying himself of his divine privileges and power, and taking on a form that we humans had earlier refused to wear, the form of a **servant**. Adam was created "full." completely formed to his task as a servant of God; in this relationship, he was given dominion

over the entire world and a close friendship with his creator. Then, after his rebellion, Adam remained a servant but now an empty one: losing the dominion, the planet, and his friendships. Since he chose not to serve God he was left to serve his belly “*by the sweat of your brow you shall earn your bread*”

Jesus on the other hand emptied himself in order to fill us. He voluntarily took on the form of a servant in order to save his wandering servants. Have you noticed, that Jesus didn't tell other people to do the work, he did the work. He could have told his disciples to break the bread – that was a small enough miracle for them to perform – instead he broke the bread. Even breaking bread can be hard work when your doing it for 5,000 people; I think that meant that Jesus also ate last. Jesus didn't ask his disciples to heal the lepers, he touched the lepers. Jesus didn't assign someone to handle the children, he called them to him. **For Jesus, like the true servant that he was, looked for all opportunities to serve and willingly did whatever needed to be done for the kingdom's sake. These are the footsteps of Jesus that we must follow – Let this mind be in you.**

During the civil war, General George McClellan, largely due to his public popularity, was put in charge of the Army of the Potomac. Though a capable soldier, McClellan was a vain man who liked to hear his nickname “Young Napoleon” but he was hesitant to get on with the war. Visiting the General's house one evening, to urge him on, Lincoln and a couple of associates was told that McClellan had gone to a wedding. Lincoln sat down and waited for an hour. At which time the General came home, but without paying any attention to the President, he went upstairs and did not return. Half an hour later, Lincoln sent a servant up to tell McClellan that he was waiting, only to have the servant come back down with the announcement that the General had gone to bed. His associates were furious at such behavior, but Lincoln merely got up and led the way home. “This is no time to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity,” Lincoln explained, “I would hold McClellan's horse if only he will bring us success.” This attitude of humility is what made Lincoln a great man and president. He was not thinking about himself he was thinking of serving others. **Service is the second mark of the mind of Christ – let this mind be in you.**

Then, verse 8 tells us how far Jesus was willing to take his **service** for us. Many people are willing to serve others if it costs them little; but as the price rises they lose interest. The only sufficient service that Jesus could render to save the world was his own personal death. Jesus knew this at the very start of his ministry, and also the night before his death – praying that there could be another way yet willing to proceed – Jesus walked to the cross for us. His pilgrimage led him to death so that he might lead us to life. **Personal sacrifice is an unavoidable part of living as a servant for others. “Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing” (Dr. J.H. Jowett).** The person with a submissive mind does not avoid sacrifices. He lives for the glory of God and the good of others; and if paying a price will honor Christ and help others he is willing to do it. **Sacrifice and service must go together, if service is to be true Christian ministry – let this mind be in you.**

Last, and most important according to verses 9-11, the **4th step of the pilgrim is to glorify God**. This is the ultimate goal of all that we do. The whole purpose of Christ's death was to bring glory to God; for even our salvation has as its ultimate goal the Glory of God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). As Jesus faced his pilgrimage to the cross, the glory of the Father was uppermost in his mind. Jesus prayed "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy son that thy son also may glorify thee*" (John 17:1).

Thus the pilgrim who yearns to walk into the footsteps of Jesus, to develop the mind of Christ, will be **submissive to Gods will**. He or she will live for others expecting that **sacrifice will be a regular part of their service**, but that in the end **it will all lead to glory**.

As scripture teaches us ...

*"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you in due time"*

1 Peter 5:6

That is what God the Father did for Jesus and that is what He will do for you if you *let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

We are all on a journey. Many go through life only looking for a vacation (trying to get away from it all so they can live for themselves). But those who claim to be Christian should be living a life of pilgrimage; one of walking into the steps of Jesus.

On this Palm Sunday, ask yourself

"Am I a pilgrim or a tourist in the Kingdom of God?"

Am I walking into the footsteps of Jesus –or- just another member of the crowd that made him weep.

An ancient Chinese saying is that "*the longest journey begins with the first step.*" Today, rather than laying palms at Jesus' feet let us take these with us into our homes and into our hearts not just as a souvenir of having been here but as a reminder of where Christ would have us go.