

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost; August 13, 2023

+ Luke 19:41-48 +

“See Clearly and Worship Truly”

**As he came near, he saw the city and wept over it. He said, “If you, yes you, had only known on this day the things that would bring peace to you. But now, it is hidden from your eyes. In fact, the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you, surround you, and hem you in on every side. Within your walls, they will dash you and your children to the ground. And within your walls, they will not leave one stone on top of another, because you did not recognize the time when God came to help you.”**

**Jesus entered the temple courts and began to drive out those who were selling things there. He told them, “It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of robbers!’”**

**Every day he was teaching in the temple courts, but the chief priests, the experts in the law, and the leaders of the people continued to look for a way to put him to death. They could not find any way to do it, because all the people were clinging to him and listening.**

The following is a true story. A mother was about to enter the sanctuary of her church when her toddler daughter decided to throw a badly timed tantrum. Desperate to get her little girl under control, the mother finally resorted to asking her, “Do you want to make Jesus cry?” And the little girl screamed, “Yes!”

If you’ve ever tried to get a freaked-out toddler to calm down, you know how tempting it is to say anything that might work. And you know that children of all ages will say things they don’t mean when they’re upset. Of course that little girl, in her heart of hearts, did not want to make Jesus cry. And even if she did, she couldn’t. No one can make Jesus cry anymore. He is exalted and glorified on heaven’s throne at his Father’s right hand.

Even when Jesus was in his humble state, even when he was walking on this earth, even then it was very hard to make him cry. In fact, there’s only thing that makes him do it. Do you know the one thing that makes Jesus weep during his life in this world? It’s death.

As Jesus stands by the tomb of his friend Lazarus, he weeps even though he is about to raise his friend. According to the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus weeps in the Garden of Gethsemane as he faces his own death on the cross. And then we have today’s Gospel, where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

But doesn’t that break the pattern? Jerusalem is a city. How can a city be dead? It doesn’t break the pattern, really. As Jesus stands over Jerusalem and weeps, he is standing over the worst kind of death. You see, his friend Lazarus was living even while he was dead, as Jesus explained to his sister. And Jesus would rise on Easter after dying on the cross. So neither of those deaths were permanent.

But for most of the people in that city of Jerusalem, it is.

It’s Palm Sunday. Many people from all over Israel have just welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as their Messiah, crying, “Save us! Son of David!” They have spread their palms and cloaks to pave the road for their King. But at the end of the path Jesus’ enemies command him to tell the crowd to be quiet.

And then, when Jesus reaches the hilltop and looks down over Jerusalem, he weeps. **He said, “If you, yes you, had only known on this day the things that would bring peace to you. But now, it is hidden from**

**your eyes.”** You can hear the sorrow in Jesus’ words. He is speaking to Jerusalem as a dearly loved daughter who is now too far gone in her rebellion. He has come to bring them peace – true peace. Not the political peace that so many in the crowd are looking for. Not the peace and quiet that his enemies want, so they can maintain the status quo of their spiritual tyranny over those people.

Jesus has come to bring them the most important peace. He has come to bring them peace between them and their heavenly Father. He has come to bring peace to their souls. He has come to bring them peace at their hour of death. He has come to bring them this true and lasting spiritual peace in the death he is about to die, and the resurrection that will follow.

But they do not see it. **“But now, it is hidden from your eyes.”** Their eyes are closed to the peace Jesus offers. As their eyes close, his open to weep.

It is sad that Jesus’ own people in his own capital city do not see him in faith or trust in him for the forgiveness of their sins. It is sad they do not see his peace. But not all have their eyes closed. The Bible often pictures the Holy Spirit’s work as opening eyes or giving sight to the blind. And he has opened many eyes. A few in Jerusalem were open to see Jesus as the Son of God and the source of eternal peace. The Spirit has opened the eyes of billions more, including yours and mine.

But we still have sin that fogs our view of Jesus and his peace. It’s a type of spiritual glaucoma that blurs your view of the peace he brings. We are sometimes not terribly interested in the eternal peace Jesus brings us. We have heard a million times about the peace we have with our heavenly Father, and become ungratefully bored with it. Instead of focusing on the lasting, spiritual peace that Jesus brings, we become more interested in other kinds of peace, and insist that he give us those. I want financial peace. I want political peace. I want peace with my family and friends.

These kinds of peace Jesus does not always give. These kinds of peace are blessings that are not guaranteed. But our peace with God forever – that Jesus does promise and deliver.

The Spirit has opened our eyes to believe, to see that greatest peace in our Savior. But we ask him to keep working to keep our eyes open, to see Jesus’ true eternal peace more and more clearly.

It will end badly for Jerusalem. Next Jesus vividly and tragically describes the destruction Jerusalem will suffer at the hands of the invading Romans two generations later. And then he states the problem again, in a very similar way: **“And within your walls, they will not leave one stone on top of another, because you did not recognize the time when God came to help you.”** Jesus very clearly calls himself “God.” God has come to earth to help the people in that city. God has come to help them by establishing that peace between them and the Father. But they do not open their eyes to that divine peace. They do not recognize God’s help.

And the final result is destruction. Jesus prophesies the destruction, but it gives him no pleasure. It gives him no pleasure when people close their eyes to his peace and turn away from God’s help. It makes him weep.

There is another word picture – actually there are lots of them – that Bible uses for the Holy Spirit’s work. This word is “enlightenment.” When the Spirit brings us to faith, he turns on the lights so we can see and recognize the divine help Jesus brings us. He helps us in the most valuable way. What no amount of gold or silver could ever pay for Jesus pays with the blood he shed. What no sinful human being could ever

achieve – the holiness that our holy God demands – Jesus supplies. What no mere human could ever accomplish by his own – to rise from the dead – Jesus gives us with his resurrection. He helps us for eternity.

As our sin fogs our sight of Jesus' eternal peace, it also clouds our recognition of his divine help. We turn to Jesus for help with many things – as we should. Health. School. Raising children. Money. Friends. And he always helps when we ask for it. He helps perfectly by giving us what is best at the right time. Even when he appears unhelpful from our point of view, he is always helping perfectly. But we don't always see it that way. I want the help I want the way I want it and I want it now. And if I don't get it then I will begin to think Jesus isn't so helpful after all! But how could the God who came to help me by taking my sins away ever give me less than perfect help with anything? How could I ever think that? I am forgetting the divine help he has already given me. My recognition is fading!

Just as Jesus brings peace for eternity, he also comes as God to help us for eternity. It is only by the Spirit's power that our eyes open to see his peace, and the light shines so we recognize his help. We always need the Spirit's work. We always need the good news of Jesus' peace and help to renew our vision of his peace and refresh our recognition of his help. And we pray, "Dear Holy Spirit, work on us with Jesus' love. Open our eyes again every day. Shine the light of faith again."

And he will do even more for us than that. He will also lead us to worship truly. For the most part, the people of Jerusalem are not seeing Jesus' peace or recognizing his help. And it shows in their worship. Yes, there are signs of life on this Palm Sunday. Crowds from all over Israel sing Jesus' praise and welcome him as their Messiah and King. Yes, there is worship going on in the temple. And at the end of the account, those who hate Jesus are unable to kill him (yet) because many are still clinging to him and listening to them.

But under the surface, the worship is at best ill or already dead. The voices who welcome him are joined by those insisting they be quiet. And by the end of the week all voices of worship will be quiet. The worship in the temple is infected by the greedy interference of vendors who distract from the prayers of the Gentiles in the courts. And those who still cling to Jesus will soon let go, as his message about the heavenly Kingdom of God does not match their priority of a worldly kingdom for Israel.

It's still true: when people do not see Jesus' peace, when they do not recognize his help, it shows in their worship. It shows in lack of worship. It shows in half-hearted worship. It shows in worship where the clock is checked more than the heart.

The word worship is closely connected to the word "worth." The word, long ago, was "worthship." When we worship, we show God what he's worth to us. What did the worship in Jerusalem say about how much the Lord was worth? What does ours say? Is God worth it to be here? Is he worth it to participate with our fellow Christians?

Is he worth it to recognize that our worship is not confined to this sanctuary? The entire life of the Christian is one huge, constant act of worship. God commands: **Whether you eat or you drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.** And: **Offer your bodies as living sacrifices; this is your spiritual act of worship.** When we come together on Sunday mornings, we are offering God worship that he desires. But he desires constant worship, that we do everything to his glory according to his commands.

Our worship here and out there falls short of what God desires. It is not the empty worship of unbelief, but it is inconsistent and incomplete. And for our worship – here and out there – to reach the level of true and pure worship that God desires, we have to let him tell us how much we are worth to him.

And that starts here. When we come here to worship, we are telling God with our songs, prayers, and offerings how much he's worth to us. But even more importantly, he's telling us how much he values us. He feeds us with his love in Christ, coming to us in Word, water, bread, and wine to forgive our sins with Jesus' gospel. And that is how much you mean to God. You are worth so much to him that he sent his Son for you, to make peace forever between you and God, to help you for eternity by earning heaven for you.

You are worth so much to God that he sent, sacrificed, and raised his Son for you. That's the number one reason we come here to worship. We are here mostly to receive from God: the good news of his Son, the promise of heaven, a stronger faith in Jesus. When we listen to God tell us – in the rich variety of ways he communicates – that we mean more to him than anything else, he sanctifies our worship of him. He works for us, opening our eyes to Jesus' peace and renews our recognition of Jesus' help. Then we worship him eagerly with pure hearts and minds. Here and in everything we do. Amen.