Luke 19:28-40 *Heart Applications: Celebration*

***Palm Sunday***Today is Palm Sunday. Today is the day we remember Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week.

I often think of Holy Week like a Roller Coaster. We start on this high hill of people throwing a parade for Jesus. And then we go down this long downhill to the Garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal by Judas and the trial before Pilate and the terrible death on the cross. But then we come rocketing back up on the other side with Easter Sunday and the resurrection. And, of course, there are a few twists and turns along the way as well.

But we start with this high point of Palm Sunday. And there are a lot of things we often associate with this day. Like the Palm Branches. And the people throwing their coats down before Jesus. And the Donkey. And the people shouting “Hosanna!” and “Blessed is He Who Comes in the name of the Lord!” We could talk about the Mount of Olives or the significance of Jesus entering Jerusalem from the east.

But today I want to talk about something we might not think about when we think about Palm Sunday. Today, I want to talk about the rocks. That’s right, the rocks.

You might wonder: “What do rocks have to do with Palm Sunday?” Well, let’s read the story and find out. **Luke 19:28-40:**

**28**After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.**29**As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, **30**“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31**If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

**32**Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. **33**As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

**34**They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

**35**They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. **36**As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

**37**When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

**38**“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

**39**Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

**40**“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

There you have it, there’s the part about the rocks. The Pharisees tell Jesus to do something about the celebrating crowds, to get them to cool it with all their singing and shouting and hailing Jesus as King, and Jesus says: “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

***Celebration***For the past 6 weeks or so, we’ve been doing a series we are caling Heart Applications. We’re talking the different ways that people have for connecting with God. We’ve said that some people connect to God via Nature. Other people find God best in Solitude. We’ve talked about the comfort of Ritual and the importance of loving others through Action. Last week we considered what it means to love God with your mind through Study.

And this week, we are looking at our sixth and final Heart Application: **Celebration.** This is the little balloon icon. This is the Heart App for those who like a good party. This is finding God in the midst of joy.

I’ll define the Heart Application of Celebration like this: people who connect with God through celebration **major in the joy of worship, find power in community, and live life with an expectation that God is going to act.** Celebration is exactly what it sounds like. If this is your heart application then you find yourself closest to God when you are right smack dab in the middle of a crowd of people who are celebrating God.

And it seems to me like Palm Sunday is the perfect day to talk about Celebration, because that’s what’s happening in this story. All of these people are celebrating Jesus (what says celebration better than a parade?), and Jesus says that if people don’t celebrate Him, the rocks will.

One of the lessons of this story, then, is that we should not give the rocks a chance!

***Worthy to Be Celebrated***Let’s consider the story.

The first thing you **notice is the donkey.** Jesus sends two disciples on ahead to find a colt. It’s a colt that has never been ridden before. And they tell the owners that the LORD has need of it and they send it along at once.

This is significant because the book of Zechariah contains a prophecy that the Messiah—the King who will rescue them—will come on a donkey. **Zechariah 9:9:**

**9**Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
    Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
    righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
    on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Moreover, Jesus is approaching Jerusalem from the east, from the Mount of Olives, which overlooks the city. This is significant because later in **Zechariah** it says:

**4**On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zechariah 14:4)

It’s clear that Luke sees a connection between Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem and these ancient prophecies.

The next thing we notice in the story is **the impromptu parade.** As Jesus rides toward Jerusalem all these people start to gather around him. They take off their cloaks and throw them on the road. Luke doesn’t mention it, but Matthew, Mark and John all tell us that they wave Palm branches in the air as well, a symbol of victory and well-being.

Now, you might wonder, where did all these people come from? It’s worth noting that Jesus was entering Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover week. This was THE major holiday on the Jewish calendar, and every year it drew thousands of pilgrims to Jerusalem. I couldn’t find hard numbers on the internet, but it is estimated that up to half of Israel’s population would have made the journey to Jerusalem every year. So as Jesus rides His donkey toward the city, He would have been surrounded by thousands of people eager to worship God.

A regular feature of these pilgrimages was singing. Scholars believe that there is a whole section of the book of Psalms specially designed to be sung at the time of Passover. Psalms 113 through 118 are known as the Egyptian Hallel. They are Psalms that look back on the Lord’s rescue of the people from Egypt.

So now, as the crowds recognize Jesus, and as the stories of his miracles spread like wildfire through the crowd, they begin to sing Psalm 118 and direct it towards Jesus. **Verses 37-38:**

**37**When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

**38**“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Luke doesn’t mention it, but Psalm 118 also includes the line “O Lord Save us”, which is a translation of the word “Hosanna!” The Psalm also talks about entering “the gates of righteousness” (Psalm 118:19) while carrying boughs of Palm branches in “festal procession.” (Psalm 118:27)

It’s a Messianic Psalm. It’s a celebration of God’s sovereignty and His ability to save.

And the crowds are directing it towards Jesus.

This does not sit well with the Pharisees. They see what is happening. The crowds are preparing to crown Jesus King. More than that, they are worshipping Him as though He were God. It is a direct violation of the first commandment for a mere human to receive worship that belongs to God alone; so the Pharisees get close to Jesus **and they demand that** He shut the crowd down:

**39**Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

And then Jesus gives His answer about the rocks. **Luke 19:40:**

**40**“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

There are several different interpretations offered for this verse. One is that Jesus is saying that as impossible as it would be for stones to cry out, it would be just as impossible for Jesus’ disciples to be quiet. The Messiah is here. How can they not rejoice?

Another interpretation looks to the immediate context. Right after Jesus says this to the Pharisees, He stops and weeps over the city of Jerusalem. He then gives a prophecy that anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem at Roman hands about 40 years later. **He says:**

**44 “**They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Like 19:44)

The reference to stones so soon after Jesus says that the stones will cry out is probably not an accident. Jesus could be saying that if the crowds were silent, then the stones will cry out in judgment against them for failing to recognize the time of God’s coming to them. The stones crying out, then, would be tied to the walls of the city being torn down.

Or, a third way of reading **Jesus’ statement** would be Jesus saying that He is worthy of praise and that if the crowds remain silent, then God will find some other way to glorify Him--even if it means making creation itself cry out in worship. Jesus is saying, in essence: “If these people do not cry out, then the earth itself will--but I will be praised.”

Personally, I’ve always assumed the third interpretation when I’ve read this verse. But I can see how either of the other two might be the case as well. Whatever way we interpret the nuances of Jesus’ statement, however, I think the main point remains the same:

**Jesus is worthy to be celebrated and, one way or another, He will be!**

It should be impossible to be silent in our worship of Jesus. At the end of time, those who refuse to confess that He is Lord will be punished. If we refuse to celebrate Jesus, then creation itself will cry out in worship! If we keep quiet, the stones will cry out!

The implication for us, then, is: **Don’t give the rocks a chance!** If the stones are waiting for our silence to worship God, then let’s keep them waiting. Let’s not miss out on our obligation to celebrate Jesus. Let’s not give the rocks a chance!

***5 Acts of Celebration***What does this look like for us? How do we practice the Heart Application of Celebration? I’ve got five acts of celebration that we should all practice to some extent or another. And if this is the Heart Application you identify with the most, then these are things you will want to incorporate into your life:

**1. Expectancy.** We should live our days on alert for God to move. It’s hard to Celebrate what God is doing if you don’t notice it.

One of the things that strikes me about the whole Palm Sunday story is the sense of anticipation that lies under everything. Those crowds on the way to celebrate Passover were already charged up. And then Jesus came riding through on the donkey and the stories of His miracles started to spread through the crowd and the people just spontaneously responded with cheers and singing and cloaks on the ground. It was obvious to them that God was doing something.

In the same way, we should move through our lives with an expectancy that we are going to see God do something. If you are one of those people who say: “It seems like God never does anything in my life” you need to ask yourself “Am I looking?” Am I looking for God to work?

We often begin our staff meetings by sharing God Stories from the past week or two. It’s a simple question of evidence we’ve seen of God at work. It might be a story from our ministries at church, it might be something we’ve seen out in the community, or it might be something that has happened in our personal lives. But the point is: we have to be looking for the God Stories in order to celebrate them.

When we live with an expectation that God will be at work we are much more likely to see it when it happens. And then we can Celebrate it.

**2. Devote Days to Celebration**. There’s something to be said for planned days of Celebration. Holidays. Feast days. Intentional days filled with pleasant things.

The ancient Jews were good at Holidays. Take this procession to Jerusalem for the Passover for example. This was the beginning of an entire week where people were taking the time off to travel—by foot—to Jerusalem to celebrate the rescue from Egypt. That’s a week or more dedicated to celebration.

More than that, they had a lot of festivals baked into their year. Pastor Perry and I were talking about it on Thursday, and while neither of us knew the exact number, we agreed that the ancient Jews took a lot of days off every year: from the weekly Sabbath to festivals like Passover and Pentecost and Purim and the Feast of Tabernacles and more, they made a point of designating days for Celebration.

And we should too.

A couple of weeks ago I talked about the Heart Application of Solitude, and I talked about the things we can learn about God and ourselves by eliminating distractions, and maybe even depriving ourselves of some things upon which we have become dependent. I mentioned the season of Lent, and the long Christian tradition of giving things up for Lent. But I also mentioned that Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter weekend, not counting Sundays. The Sundays in Lent are not considered to be a part of Lent because Sundays are always meant to be days of Celebration. Sundays commemorate the day Jesus rose from the dead, so even during a season of reflection and sacrifice, Sundays stand out as days of Joy.

So I looked up whether or not your commitment to give things up for Lent still applied on Sunday. Officially, the Catholic Church does not encourage you to break your fast on the Sundays of Lent; but technically, it seems to me that you could. It’s sort of like built in “Cheat days.” It’s O.K.to have days dedicated to Celebration.

We sometimes think that God gives us more credit when we deprive ourselves of things, like God loves us best when we are suffering for Him. But God equally wants us to delight in the good things that He has given us. The Thanksgiving Day Turkey, the Easter chocolates, the gifts under the Christmas tree, are all good ways to celebrate God’s generosity toward us.

John Ortberg writes this:

Devote a specific day to acts of celebration so that eventually joy will infuse your entire life. One day a week eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that stretches and challenges you, read books that refresh your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty—and as you do these things, give thanks to God for his wonderful goodness. Reflect on what a gracious God he is to have thought of these gifts. Take the time to experience and savor joy, then direct your heart toward God so that you come to *know* he is the giver of “*every* good and perfect gift.” (*The Life You’ve Always Wanted,* p. 70)

**3. Sing!** If Celebration has a sound, and I believe it does, it is the sound of singing. Celebration usually involves music.

That first Palm Sunday obviously involved singing. They were singing the Psalms to Jesus. Jewish festivals were invariably accompanied by song. In fact, when I hear Jesus say that if His disciples are silenced the stones will cry out, what I think of is singing. If human worship comes to an end, then I believe the sound of the stones crying out will sound like singing. Jesus will be praised, no matter what, and that praise will be in the form of song.

The [Bible](https://www.biblestudytools.com/) contains over 400 references to singing and 50 direct commands to sing. God has a passion for singing. The book of Zephaniah says that He sings over us, and the Psalms invite us, again and again, to sing a new song to the Lord.

There are several reasons I think music is an important part of our relationship with God:

For one thing, music is a language of emotion. Music is capable of touching our spirits in profound and subtle ways. And this is true of every culture and in every age. So upbeat songs in major keys are usually associated with happiness, while slower songs in minor keys help us express sorrow.

Likewise, music is an excellent memory aid. C.J. Mahaney calls the songs we sing at church “take home theology.” There is something about the rhythm and melody and rhyming schemes of music that enable us to remember songs long after other ideas and facts have escaped us. Think about how you can hear a song from your teenage ears and instantly sing along with it, even if you have not heard the song for decades. We store hundreds, if not thousands, of songs in our memory vaults. The songs we sing are one of the best ways we learn and remember truths about God.

And, again, music has an incredible unifying power. People sing together in all kinds of places: rock concerts, sporting events, birthdays, weddings, funerals. Singing together tends to bind us together. It enables us to spend extended periods of times expressing the same thoughts and passions. And when it comes to the church, and joining our voices in praise of our Lord and Savior, it’s one of the primary ways we make sure the rocks never get a chance.

And so, let me issue this challenge to those of you who do not particularly like to sing, or those of you who don’t feel comfortable singing in church because you aren’t very good at it: It does not matter! Singing in scripture is not really optional for those who have been redeemed. It’s a primary way that we Celebrate Jesus.

As many of you know—especially if you sit over in this general area of the sanctuary—I am not a good singer. But I still sing. And I sing loudly. Because I don’t want to give the rocks a chance. You may have heard me say this before: If God has given you a good singing voice, then sing out, in order to thank Him. And if He has not given you a good singing voice, then sing louder, to get even with Him. But either way: sing!

**4. The Power of Groups.** Another part of the Heart Application of Celebration is the way it feeds on being around other people. If Solitude is the Heart App for introverts, then Celebration is the Heart App for extroverts.

There is just something energizing, for many people, about being part of a crowd. That first Palm Sunday probably would not have been very exciting if had just been Jesus and His 12 closest disciples. But since there were thousands of people on the road from Bethany, there was something electrifying and dynamic about it.

Gary Thomas tells a story about a conference speaker who gave a talk that focused on the “sacred pathways” (what we are calling Heart Applications) concept. At the end of the talk, a young pastor came up to the speaker with an air of defeat.

The pastor explained how he had decided to go away for the weekend on a prayer and study retreat. He found a location with minimal distractions and got ready for what he hoped would be a mountaintop experience. As the minutes dragged by, this pastor realized he was not going to make it through the night, much less an entire weekend. He gave up, returned home, and [now confessed] “How can I be a pastor who teaches others how to pray when I can’t spend even one weekend alone by myself?”

Knowing this pastor to be a very relational sort, [the speaker] replied, “Have you ever thought of bringing some buddies along with you on these retreats?”

The pastor looked at him in astonishment and asked, “Is that legal?” (Sacred Pathways, p. 180-181)

The truth is, some of us are just not wired to be alone. We thrive on the interaction with others, and we’ll get much more out of a retreat with 20 people than we would out of weekend by ourselves.

And even if you are more of an introvert, and don’t always feel comfortable in groups, there is still something to be said about regularly getting together with other Christians for fellowship and encouragement and the combined act of Celebration.

**5. Start Now.** Finally, let me encourage you to begin Celebrating now. Don’t wait. Find something to celebrate today.

John Ortberg writes:

We all live with the illusion that joy will come someday when conditions change. We go to school and think we will be happy when we graduate. We are single and are convinced we will be happy when we get married. We get married and decide we will be happy someday when we have children. We have children and decide we will be happy when they grow up and leave the nest—then they do, and we think we were happier when they were still at home. (p. 68)

If we are always waiting for conditions to be perfect in order to celebrate, then we may not ever celebrate at all. After all, we live in a world broken and tarnished by sin. There will always be some reason to be unhappy, there will always be some dark cloud to block out the sun If you are one of those people who is always waiting to rejoice, well, then, you are someone who is missing out on a lot of joy.

The Psalm that the crowds song to Jesus on that first Palm Sunday was Psalm 118. Psalm 118 contains a verse that many of us have heard, one that gets quoted at the beginning of many worship services. It’s **verse 24,** and it says:

**24**This is the day the LORD has made;
 let us rejoice and be glad in it.

I’ve always heard that verse as a declaration that this day, this new day, is a gift from God; and so we should rejoice and be glad in the day.

But the new version of the NIV has rephrased this verse quite a bit. It’s not the way I’ve memorized it, but in this case I like the new phrasing better because it emphasizes the importance of celebrating today, **instead of always waiting for something different**:

**24**The Lord has done it this very day;
    let us rejoice today and be glad.

The “this” that first line talks about is a reference to salvation. It follows the line that says “the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone” (v. 22). It’s a celebration of the truth that God saves. Hosanna!

Which, of course, was the very reason Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on that first Sunday.

And so, I read verse 24 as a reminder that no matter what else is going on in your life, no matter what difficulty and trial today may bring your way, always remember that Jesus has saved you.

And that alone is a reason to celebrate. That alone is a reason that you can rejoice today, and be glad.

John Ortberg, again:

If we don’t rejoice today, we will not rejoice at all. If we wait until conditions are perfect, we will still be waiting when we die. If we are going to rejoice, it must be in this day. This is the day the Lord has made. (p. 69)

So Celebrate. Today. And every day. Don’t give the rocks a chance!