

It's in the details

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Luke 19:28-40

First Presbyterian Church

April 14, 2019

Bible Readings

Isaiah 50:4-9a

4The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; 8he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Luke 19:28-40

28After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, "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. 31If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34They said, "The Lord needs it." 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As 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, 38saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Psalm 118:19-29

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

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

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Sermon

For a number of reasons this week

I'm reminded that life involves a lot of details.

Last weekend I had the privilege of serving

as one of the pastors at Presbyterian Pilgrimage # 159 –

led by none other than our own Martha Hill

who was the Rector –

and staffed by many, hard-working FPC members.

Martha's arms are probably still tired

because she spent the entire weekend

carrying around a notebook about yay thick –

an ever-present and visible sign

of the countless details that were involved in that event.

Yesterday, our Presbyterian Women

hosted the Spring Gathering of Western N C presbytery.

The planning team has been meeting and planning

and emailing and planning

and talking on the phone and planning for months

and yesterday, all that attention to detail

was very clearly displayed.

Though these were special events

which obviously involve a lot of detail,

the same is true of our everyday lives, right?

Phones keep ringing... texts keep dinging.

Children get sick on the day you have a must-attend meeting.

One child has soccer practice

at the same time another has gymnastics.

Pick up the grandkids at school

and get to their band concert.

We juggle doctor's appointments

with therapy and medicine schedules.

Then we all go to church on Sunday,

and what do we find but more details?

We have hymns and prayers...

readings and stuff to confess...
sometimes we stand and other times we sit...
and let me tell you,
the details of serving communion in the church
would challenge even a logistics professional.
Of course, the word "liturgy"
does mean the "work of the people"...
but the truth be told,
our liturgy can sometimes seem like a lot of work.
Life is details – at home, at work, at school, at church.

Well, in our Gospel reading this morning
DID YOU NOTICE THE DETAIL
with which Luke describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem?
We are given the exact location –
the Jerusalem suburbs of Bethphage and Bethany –
at a place called the Mount of Olives.
We're told that Jesus then pulls two of his disciples aside:
"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."

Detail.
Jesus has clearly spent time thinking about this day...
preparing for this day.
He knows exactly what type of colt he wants...
(one that has never been ridden).
He knows exactly where the colt is...
(at the entrance to the village).
He has even prepared a response to the public relations problem
of swiping a colt without permission.
"If anyone asks you, just say this: 'The Lord needs it.'"

So, what's this about?
Why is Jesus being such a perfectionist –
planning everything down to the smallest detail?
Why doesn't he just ask his disciples
to get him a ride into town? Why?
Because Jesus is concerned with far more
than simply getting from here to there.
He's concerned with fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy
of the long-awaited Messiah...
that said: "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.”

Jesus is all about detail because he is determined
to get his arrival into Jerusalem exactly right.

And Luke wants to make sure we know that!

I don't know about you,
but I've always thought
that being overly concerned with detail
is a hindrance to true spirituality...
that true spiritual devotion
means escaping our concern with detail...
that really spiritual people don't concern themselves
with the things the rest of us do.

They don't worry about mortgages and car payments
and dentist appointments and church committee meetings.

They wear Birkenstocks and meditate
and still have a flip phone that they never turn on.

But that's not really a Biblical understanding of spirituality.

According to the Bible,
the obstacle/hindrance to our spirituality
is not that we pay attention to the details of life...
but that we pay too much attention to the wrong details.

During his life there were many details that Jesus simply ignored.

One, he didn't worry about the detail of **urgency**.

Though he was often on the move
and very focused on where he was going,
Jesus was never in a big hurry.

For example, on the way to Jairus's home
to heal his dying daughter,
the Lord stopped to attend to a woman
with a chronic illness.

What could be more urgent than a dying child?

He would have been excused
if he had hurried by this woman to get to the crisis.

But he didn't... he never seemed to fall victim
to what Steven Covey calls the “tyranny of the urgent.”

Neither did he worry about the detail of **effectiveness**.

Man, I'm all about effectiveness –
“Work smarter, not harder” –
I just said that yesterday...
getting the job done as efficiently as possible .

But remember the parable Jesus told

about the sower who threw his seed on all kinds of ground?
A whole lot of it was ineffective...
 only a small portion fell on good soil and grew.
Which tells us that for Jesus
 faithfulness comes before effectiveness.
Only God gives the growth...
 only God gives the increase...
 only God grants success.

What about **recognition**?

Jesus didn't much worry about the detail of recognition.
Think of the well-known story of Mary and Martha.
 Martha was slaving away in the kitchen
 trying to get a meal on the table
 while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to him talk.
Martha came storming out
 wanting Jesus to recognize all she was doing.
And all he had to do was give her a certificate saying,
 "Martha is a Hard Worker."
But he never did things like that.
 He only recognized people who were not looking for it –
 like the widow giving her offering in the temple.

He also didn't seem to care about the detail of **popularity**.

Instead... to the **Pharisees**
 that wanted him to come down harder on sinners –
to the **Zealots**
 that wanted him to lead their armed insurrection –
to his own **disciples**
 that wanted him to make them great in his kingdom –
Jesus was an equal opportunity disappointment.
He didn't care about being popular with any of them...
 he cared about God's kingdom.

And finally, Jesus didn't worry about the detail of **tomorrow**.

Do you remember his words in the Sermon on the Mount?
Of course, you do... it's one of his most difficult teachings –
 "Can any of you by worrying
 add a single hour to the span of your life?
So, do not worry about tomorrow,
 for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.

So... the details that almost consume us –
 like living in a constant state of urgency...

like always needing to be effective...
like enjoying a little recognition for what we do...
like being popular or at least well-regarded...
like worrying about the future...

THESE particular DETAILS never much bothered Jesus.

And therein lies the disconnect.

So concerned are we about THESE details
that we overlook the details that he was concerned about.
So distracted are we by the WRONG details
that we have no time or energy left
to recognize our savior when he comes.

When Jesus sat upon that young colt
and began to ride into Jerusalem,
there were some who were wise enough
to recognize the moment.

Many did not, but some did.

And in response they cut branches
and took off their cloaks
and spread them all on the ground in front of him.

And they began to shout the words
that THEY had learned year after year
in the detail of regular temple worship –
“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!”

Yes... year after year, week after week, day after day,
they paid attention to the details of looking for a savior.
And when that Savior came, they recognized him and were ready.

We know the details of Palm Sunday, the Last Supper,
Good Friday, and Easter.

We’ve gone through this year after year – every Holy Week.

So, why do we do this again?

We do it for the same reason
we go through the details every Sunday.

It’s the only way
we will take our eyes off the things that do not matter...
so that we can set them on the things that do.