

Coming Down the Mountain" (Luke 19:29–44)(4.5.20)

Luke 19:29–44 (NIV84)

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?' tell him, '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."

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 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."

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: "Coming Down the Mountain"

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

At the beginning of Lent, we spent at least three weeks atop the Mountain of Transfiguration. I promised that we would come down that mount and into Jerusalem at the end of Lent. And, here we are. Jesus is coming down the Mount of Olives and entering triumphantly into the city of Peace; although, it was anything but peaceful.

The reason we spent so much time on Mount Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration, was because it was that portion of scripture in which the most important question and answer were declared. Who do people say that Jesus is? Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The Father then confirmed, this is my beloved Son. God calling Jesus beloved is also a reference to his position as king. The kingdom of God was declared on that rock of Mount Hermon.

Again the crucial question arises. Is Jesus the king or not? Is Jesus the long awaited Messiah or not? The people following Jesus shouted Yes! Hosanna in the highest. The Pharisees said no! Jesus rebuke your disciples! Even if none of the people declared the truth, creation would – the very stones will cry out.

Then we find Jesus weeping. He came to his own but they did not receive Him.

Jerusalem and the people would come to a terrible destruction. Jesus prophesied and history validated Him as a prophet. Why was Jerusalem and her children brutally destroyed? "You did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Clearly, Jesus is

referring to His arrival as the arrival of God.

BODY:

Some of us are reading through a Chronological Bible together this year. We started in the book of Judges this week. Over and over again, God's chosen people would do what was evil in the sight of the Lord their God. Punishment would follow as God's anger was kindled against the people.

The people would cry out to God and the Lord would hear the cry of His people. He would raise up a Judge to lead them and rescue them. Most often this was in the form of war against foreign kings. Victory was secured and there would be peace for 40 years, a biblical generation.

Then again, the people would fall away from God and following His commandments. It is amazing to me that the human race thinks it is so smart. And yet, our pride, arrogance, selfishness – the virus called sin – causes us to forget the most important truth known to humanity. There is one God and there is no other. Jesus is God.

Today, we begin Holy Week. Probably, no American alive today has seen a Holy Week quite like this one. We have been inundated with the news of the COVID-19 virus with a bombardment of the numbers of infections and the numbers of death. It is almost impossible not be fearful when we are being saturated with apocalyptic rhetoric.

Imagine if we dedicated the resources used to fight the corona virus towards making the Lord Jesus known. What if every heart was a Jerusalem on Palm Sunday crying out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Yes, it is tragic when people die needlessly. What is supremely tragic is when people die and their souls spend eternity separated from God Almighty and in the fire that never goes out. Where are our priorities? Is this a wake-up call? Who do you say that Jesus is?

I am going to share a good portion of an interview from two weeks ago. It is from March 17th and I read it in an online magazine called The Atlantic.

Peter Wehner interviewed Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health. You have seen a Dr. Fauci speaking frequently these last few weeks on the same podium as President Trump. Dr. Fauci works for Dr. Francis Collins.

Wehner recalls, "I first met Francis Collins when I worked in the White House during the George W. Bush presidency. He, Michael Gerson, the president's chief speechwriter, and I had lunch in the West Wing to discuss not politics but science and faith. Most of those who know about Collins associate him with science; far fewer know about his interest in Christian witness. So I asked him to describe his journey of faith.

Growing up, Collins's religious instruction was limited to being sent to the local Episcopal church choir to learn music, "instructed by my dad to ignore the rest of it, which I did," he told me. In college and then graduate school, he found himself moving from the category of agnostic to atheist. "I would have challenged anybody who wanted to bring to the conversation some discussion about God. I would have asserted they were basically stuck in some past era of supernaturalism that is no longer necessary, because science has eliminated the need for it," is how he put it to me.

But the time came when, as a third-year medical student, he was no longer learning about the human body in a lecture hall; he was sitting at the bedside of people with terrible illnesses, most of which physicians had imperfect methods to be able to help.

“Watching those individuals’ fates, what was going to be coming soon, the end of their life, I was trying to imagine what I would do in that circumstance,” Collins shared with me. “This was in North Carolina, and there were a lot of wonderful individuals, many of them having had relatively simple lives, but lives that were totally dedicated to helping other people.

Many of these people were deeply committed to faith. I was puzzled and unsettled to see how they approached something that I personally was pretty terrified about: the end of their lives. They had peace and equanimity, and even a sort of sense of joyfulness that there was something beyond. I didn’t know what to do with it.”

“It made me realize that I had never really gone beyond the most superficial consideration of whether God exists, or a serious consideration about what happens after you die.”

Collins told me about a patient he had gotten pretty attached to—“she reminded me of my grandmother,” he said—and who suffered from advanced cardiac disease, which included almost daily episodes of crushing chest pain. “And yet she came through this all with remarkable peace and was very comfortable sharing the reasons for that with me, namely her faith in Jesus.

And at one point after one of those sharing moments, she looked at me in a quizzical way and said, ‘You know, doctor’—she did call me doctor, I wasn’t yet—‘You have listened to me talk about my faith, but you never say anything. What do you believe?’ Just very direct, very simple question, and it was like a thunderclap. Like a realization that I could not walk away from, but that was the most important question I’ve ever been asked.”

Collins later met a Methodist pastor, Sam MacMillan, who was “a very willing partner for me, tolerating my blasphemous questions and assuring me that if God was real there would be answers.” It was MacMillan who introduced Collins to the work of C. S. Lewis, starting with *Mere Christianity*.

“I realized in the very first two or three pages of that book that most of my objections against faith were utterly simplistic. They were arguments from a schoolboy. Here was an Oxford intellectual giant who had traveled the same path from atheism to faith, and had a way of describing why that made sense that was utterly disarming. It was also very upsetting. It was not the answer I was looking for.” But it was, for Collins, the answer he eventually found, and at 27, he became a Christian.

The embrace of that faith transformed not only his relationship with God, but also how he viewed other people, and himself. “They are all, as Lewis said, angels around you. And the notion therefore that it is okay to put yourself in the driver’s seat in every way, regardless of what effect that has on others, it’s simply indefensible. I think it did take what had been for me a pretty strong ambitious driving approach and moderate it, not to say that I didn’t retain a fair amount of that, but maybe in a somewhat more loving, forgiving approach.”

When I asked him how he sees faith now, in his late 60s, compared with how he saw things in his late 20s, he told me, “I think I’ve also arrived at a place where my faith has become a really strong support for dealing with life’s struggles. It took me awhile, I think—that sense that God is sufficient and that I don’t have to be strong in every circumstance.”

I found that striking, particularly in this moment. “One of my great puzzles when I first

became a Christian is that verse, 'My grace is sufficient for you, because My strength is made perfect in your weakness,'" he told me. "That was so completely upside down for me. Weakness? And now I embrace that with the fullness of everything around me when I'm realizing that my strength is inadequate, whether it's coronavirus or some family crisis, God's strength is always sufficient. That is such a great comfort, but it took me a long time to get to the point of really owning that one."

I found hope in that interview and I pray that you do too. There is a great lesson for us in these troubling days. May we always remember that God's grace is sufficient for us. We are not to be afraid but trust in our God.

CONCLUSION:

This week, Galloway Councilman Tony DiPetro was calling churches and he called Emmaus and left a message on our machine. After some phone tag, I spoke to him a little before dinner last night. Tony is a family man with young children and he is a Christian.

He is trying to organize something special for the churches in Galloway to do on Easter. He asked if we had a working bell. His idea is that all the churches would ring their bells or make announcements over loudspeakers at 12 PM on Easter. I told him we would love to participate in making the message of Easter heard.

My friends, we live in a dying world and I don't mean that figuratively. This pandemic should awaken every soul to that reality.

It is my prayer that hearts will be pricked and people will cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer, as we all know, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

There is another hill ahead. It is called Calvary. In five days from the triumphant entry, Jesus was carrying his cross up Calvary. How could this happen? Where are the crowds claiming Jesus as king? But, there is hope on that hill. For Jesus, will be coming down from that cross. Jesus will be coming down that hill. They will lay his body in a tomb and seal it with a stone. Another stone. I wonder if it was crying out?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.