

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“The Tears of Christ”**  
**Luke 19:41-44**  
**April 9, 2017**

Luke is a masterful artist in the way he puts together his gospel. And this morning we have a front row seat to some of that artistry. But like many artists, I don't always recognize **how** masterful they are until someone points out some of the magnificent subtlety.

And what Luke does here, in what we heard this morning, is subtle and he's the only gospel writer who does it. So I want to make sure we don't miss it because it's easy to miss. In fact, I always missed it until it was pointed out to me in my study of the scripture this week.

For starters, Luke tweaks what the crowds are shouting as Jesus is riding into town. It's there in 19:38 if you want to take a look. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” they shout... and that sounds pretty familiar, right? That's what we're used to hearing on Palm Sunday.

But did you catch what comes next? “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.” It doesn't sound quite right. It doesn't fit here, does it?

But it is familiar.

It sounds a whole lot like something else that only Luke writes about.

It sounds a lot like Luke, Chapter 2, when a choir of angels appears to a group of shepherds to tell them about the birth of their Savior, and the angels sing, “Glory... in the highest heavens and peace on earth...”

Luke is the only one to write about the angels singing at Jesus' birth, and he's the only one to put a similar song in the mouth of the crowd.

Which means Luke is trying to make a connection for us. As Jesus parades into Jerusalem, Luke is pointing back... to that mysterious moment of Jesus' coming into our world. Something about what is happening now, here, on Palm Sunday, is connected to what happened in Bethlehem that mysterious Christmas night.

And this isn't the only way he connects the two. His connections keep going and get richer,

and especially poignant for us as a church...

because here at this moment, as Jesus rides into Jerusalem,

Luke points back to that moment in Chapter one where our church's name is first spoken.

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We just heard Brad read verses 41-44, and Luke is the only gospel writing that tells this story here. This little passage is unique to Luke, which makes it especially intriguing. Luke is doing something unique and intentional.

Jesus is parading into Jerusalem, and if you're anything like me, you picture it as a bit of a party, right?

Maybe there are kids dancing around.

The disciples are beaming. It's an exciting day.

The crowds are full of excitement too.

After all, these are probably people that have encountered something profound in Jesus. And you probably know quite a few of the people in this crowd. You've heard their stories.

So I imagine Zacchaeus is in the crowd... trying to stay up close so he can see. Or who knows, maybe he's riding on one of the disciple's shoulders.

And in the crowd you have blind Bartimaeus who is now "seeing Bartimaeus" which doesn't have nearly as nice a ring to it, but Bartimaeus is dancing down the road with the rest of them. Shoot, after today they might start calling him bouncing Bartimaeus.

And Luke tells us that the crowd is full of women disciples that have been supporting Jesus, women who were finally given dignity and hope by the way Jesus treated them. So you've got Mary Magdalene, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus.

I wonder if Jirus, his wife, and daughter are in the crowd.

Maybe the bleeding woman who has finally been made whole.

Maybe the bent over woman who now stands up straight is with them, too.

The crowd has been growing as Jesus has been making his way for 10 chapters now toward Jerusalem. And here they are, celebrating, excited.

But as Jerusalem comes into view over the horizon, and the celebration continues, Jesus' demeanor begins to change. I imagine no one noticed, being that they are all caught up in the excitement.

But if you were there...and you ***had taken the time to look deeply into Jesus' face... you would have seen it***, his eyes welling up... and tears collecting in the corners. One tear drips down his cheek... then another.

As they approached the city,  
and Jesus began to watch Jerusalem grow on the horizon,  
"he wept," Luke says.

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If by some chance you did look up and see these tears, you would have probably felt a bit awkward about the whole thing... the way we do when we see a grown man cry. It makes us really uncomfortable, doesn't it? Especially in public. It's why I was trying so hard to choke back my tears at the movies last week.

And I imagine it would have made the people in the crowd uncomfortable, too... And probably confused.

At first they might have thought those were tears of joy as they're getting closer to Jerusalem, the beloved city.

But there's no joy in these tears.

A few of them might have been inclined to think those tears were about the suffering Jesus said was going to happen when he got to Jerusalem. After all, he's already told them three times what was going to take place.

But tears on this man's face, the tears of Jesus, are not of self-pity either... or tears of fear, or tears of despair. Not today anyway.

These... are the tears... of a broken heart.

They are the tears that well up within you when you begin to see someone else's deep suffering,

The tears of Jesus are the tears of a parent when they watch their children make choices that they know lead to self-destruction.

They are the tears of a friend, sitting in the living room hearing about the affair that just came to light.

They are the tears of a sister who watches bitterness grow between her brothers.

They are the tears that you have shed and I have shed over those we love,

and the tears we've shed over the suffering in our world  
in places like Syria and Palestine,  
in Sudan and Somalia.

The tears... coming down Jesus' cheeks are the tears of a God whose love runs so deep, and whose heart breaks by all the ways we are closed off to that love,  
and all the ways we are blind to that love  
and all the ways we are unable or unwilling to trust that love.

These are the tears of Jesus on this day. His tears... well up from the deep and profound love that God has for the world...

They are the tears that well up from the deep and profound love that God has for each and every broken, twisted, messed up, defensive, lonely soul that has walked this earth.

Luke says that Jesus weeps as he watches Jerusalem come into focus, not for himself, but for just how lost and self-destructive we all are. "If only you knew on this of all days, the things that lead to peace," Jesus says. "But now they are hidden from your eyes."

And this is where Luke begins to incorporate the poetic artistry again. Jesus ends by saying that not one stone will be left upon another, "*because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation from God.*"

And that word "**visitation**" is a special word. The word there in Greek is "*episkopos*." It's a word Luke has used before... way back at the very beginning of his gospel... back in Chapter 1,  
just after John the Baptist was born,  
just a few verses before Jesus is born,  
back in that beautiful verse,  
where our church's name comes from.

Luke 1:78. "By the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high will "*episkopos*" us..." will "visit" us, will "break upon us." It's the same word.

And Luke, in Chapter 1, goes on to say that when the dayspring, the morning light, breaks in and visits us he will "give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guide our feet in the *path of peace*."

Peace, the same reality Jesus is talking about here, "If you only knew the things ***that lead to peace...*** but they are hidden from your eyes."

Once again Luke is ever so artfully pointing back to the birth story.... connecting the beauty and the tragedy of the incarnation with the beauty and the tragedy of the crucifixion.

Here in this moment, as Jesus rides toward Jerusalem, the dayspring is rising upon them. The visitation of our God is coming... the dayspring that is to guide our feet into the way of peace.

But Jerusalem doesn't recognize this visitation,  
"on this of all days." Jesus says they don't recognize "the light that is rising upon them, that can lead us, to the path of peace."

And so Jesus sees and speaks of their coming destruction...

The destruction of this holy city that he has loved,  
this place where he and his family came every year to worship,  
where as a child he sat and spoke with the elders about God.

Jesus sees the destruction of these people to whom he is deeply connected to.

He sees and he speaks of their coming destruction as his gut is filled with this profound sense of love and sorrow, and his eyes are welling up with tears.

He weeps for them.

He weeps for us.

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This is another one of those moments, just like last week, where you can really hear multiple layers of meaning.

On the one hand, the historical/critical scholars will tell us that Jesus is describing an actual/literal siege that will take place, surrounding Jerusalem, destroying it. About 35 years after Jesus rides into Jerusalem, by the time Luke is writing this down, that is exactly what has happened.

There was a political uprising. The Jewish people tried to break free of Rome to find peace, but "they don't recognize what brings real peace." And their political revolution only led to the complete destruction of Jerusalem.

So, on a certain level, Jesus is weeping for this literal destruction that he can see will surely come (and does come decades later).

But on another level, he's weeping because he knows what will come that very week. The religious leaders will get nervous. They know that if Rome starts to feel threatened by a popular uprising happening with Jesus they will come in and destroy what little stability the Jewish people have left. And so the only way to keep the peace is to get rid of Jesus.

The High Priest will say as much. "Don't you see that it is better that one man die for his people, than the entire nation be destroyed?" he will ask.

So, they will make a decision. And things get set in motion that will lead the crowds of people to shout, "Crucify Him, we have no king but Caesar," just 5 days from now.

The religious leaders were just trying to keep the peace, but they were leading the people to their own profound condemnation...

where they will reject God as their king,  
they will reject the author of life,  
and choose the power of the state instead.

And so Jesus is weeping for all those led to trust in political expediency and the myth of redemptive violence... over a radical trust in God and the way of Jesus. "If only you knew, on this of all days, the things that lead to peace. But they have been hidden from your eyes."

But that's not all. Jesus is also weeping... for all those who are led astray,  
who will shout and speak their own condemnation,  
for all those who are blind to the profound love of God that is  
rising like a light upon them even now.

Jesus weeps because there is nothing more gut wrenching than your child, whom you love deeply, not knowing, not seeing, not being able to see, and embrace and accept the profound love you have for them.

And so on another level here,  
one that reaches the depths of your soul,  
Jesus weeps for the anxieties we wake up with each day,  
and our fears that manipulate us,  
and the loneliness that grips us and keeps us from recognizing...  
the light that is rising upon our own darkness,  
that keeps us from recognizing the visitation of our God.

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Because here's the thing: we miss it most of the time.

Christ is born in and among us, but we don't recognize him... swaddled in a tattered cloth, held in the arms of a Middle Eastern refugee mother far from home, fleeing the Harrods of our world who would massacre babies.

Christ is riding toward Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of our world, and the Jerusalem deep within us, to be crucified, and we think he's come to punish us, or to scold us for making such a mess of things,  
when in reality he hangs there in suffering love saying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

We wonder if God has abandoned us,  
or if we've just made it all up,  
if this faith of ours was just a pipe dream because there is such emptiness, but we don't recognize that the emptiness is an empty tomb from which God's life bursts open within us.

There are countless ways God is visiting you in your life, the light of God is rising upon us.  
in conversation with friends,  
in the work that you've been entrusted with  
in the relationships you've been given,  
and so often we miss it.

Instead of seeing it, we're caught up in our own to do lists. We complain about our life,  
or we manufacture meaning,  
or we try and try and try so much that we run ourselves ragged...  
thinking that all that trying, and all that fixing, and all that fighting is what will lead to peace.

All the while we miss the visitation of our God. And so Jesus weeps.  
He sees you more clearly than you see yourself,  
and his deep love for you brings tears to his eyes.  
He weeps, and in his weeping we encounter the longing heart of God,  
who is longing for you.

So open your eyes. Pay attention.  
Look deeply in the face of Jesus... this week especially.  
And recognize the visitation of our God.

Amen.

