**Two Processions:**

**Palm Sunday**

**3-29-15; 4-10-22**

Two processions. This morning, you have heard about two processions.

- The first was the one you would expect to hear about on Palm Sunday – Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

- That one was full of excitement, joy and anticipation!

- While the second one…well, it seems a bit odd and out of place on this day of celebration – because it was a funeral procession outside the city of Nain in Galilee.

- Unlike the first one, it is accompanied by wailing and sorrow and a sense of helplessness.

- Two processions.

- In both people are caught up in the moment.

- In both people are caught up with emotion.

- And soon, in both processions, the people involved would be caught up in the surprise of their lives.

The first procession is the one we are supposed to talk about today: Jesus entering Jerusalem.

* The people involved in this procession are deliriously happy as they walk ahead of Jesus, proclaiming him King.
  + They were happy, because they believe the time of their oppression is soon to be over.
* These people had been afflicted under the heavy hand of the brutal Roman empire for many years.

- But now their time of emancipation was at hand.

* For three years they have watched Jesus heal the sick, feed the hungry, cast out demons, and confound religious and political leaders.
  + They have come to believe that He is, in fact, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament who would restore the throne of David.
    - As the prophet Isaiah had spoken:

*The people who walked in darkness  
    have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
    on them has light shone.****3****You have multiplied the nation;  
    you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
    as with joy at the harvest,  
    as they are glad when they divide the spoil.****4****For the yoke of his burden,  
    and the staff for his shoulder,  
    the rod of his oppressor,  
    you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

* So now they rejoice! And why not?
  + Today, it was Jesus himself has set it in motion with his choice of riding in on the colt of a donkey.
    - Everyone knew the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, including Jesus.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
    Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
    righteous and having salvation is he,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
    on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

* + - Wasn’t it Jesus, himself, who sent his disciples out to find the donkey for him to ride on?
      * Mark 11:1-2 tells us:

*1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples 2 and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.*

* + - * Jesus knew what he was setting in motion. The symbol is unmistakable.
      * Clearly, Jesus intended to publicly declare to anyone who understood the prophecy that his Kingdom has finally come.
* But while the people involved in this procession understood the prophecy, they didn’t understand His Kingdom.
  + Oh, they understood that the time had come when Jesus would throw off the oppressor and set His people free.
    - They just didn’t understand that his interests were broader than just Israel and more far-reaching than just political power.
  + Jesus wants to set all of humanity free.
    - Not just from Rome or any other brutality on the Earth, but from the spiritual bondage that leads us back to such inhumanity again and again…
    - And, ultimately, from death itself.

- And not just for now, but for all of eternity.

* + The people involved in that first procession didn’t understand all that.
    - And neither did they understand what it would take to achieve it – the death of their Messiah.

And that’s what leads us to the great irony of this Triumphal Procession.

* It was, indeed, everything the people thought it was:
  + The declaration of Jesus as King, the beginning of their emancipation, the destruction of their enemy.
* Yet, it was nothing that these people thought it would be.
  + For throughout the coming week, at every opportunity He has to display his Messianic power and authority, Jesus balks.
    - He rejects their overtures to declare him their new King.
    - He refuses to take advantage of the political advantage and momentum He has gained.
    - He speaks continually of his impending death.
    - And in the end, He allows himself to be taken and tried – not only by the religious leaders, but also by the Romans.
  + By the end of the week, many of these same people who were hailing him as King on Palm Sunday were calling for his crucifixion on Good Friday.
    - Disappointed and disillusioned; offended and vindictive.
  + All because God’s purpose and plan was so much bigger than anything the people could ever have imagined…OR WANTED.
    - And because it didn’t comport with what they wanted or expected, they rejected their Messiah.

Which brings us back to the second procession we read about: The funeral procession in Nain.

* Unlike the procession in Jerusalem where the people were going out ahead of Jesus, leading Him into the city, here we have a procession of people walking out of the city toward Jesus.
  + Luke tells us that a large crowd was escorting the funeral bier (a slab on which they were carrying the dead man’s body) out of town along with the dead man’s widowed mother.
    - Since corpses were considered unclean, Jews of that day would bury them outside of town on the same day of their death.
  + So the sting of death was fresh as they made their way out of town and there was much wailing and weeping as was the custom of the time.
* Now Jesus, and the crowd that was with him, had been walking toward town and now stopped and stepped to the side to allow the funeral procession to pass by, sobered I am sure by the sight of it.
  + Unlike the Triumphal Procession that would come a couple of years later in Jerusalem, no one at this procession had any great expectations.
    - Here they perceived no future, and they had no hope.
  + In fact, things were even bleaker than you might think.
    - The text here emphasizes that the bereaved loved-one on this road was a widow who had just lost her only son.
      * Which means that not only was she grieving the loss of her son, but her own future was now in doubt as well.
    - Because, in those days, family was the only safety net an old person had.
      * And this was especially true for widowed women who had no earning power of their own.
      * So now, with her family was gone, her future was gone with it.
    - This was a very bleak procession.
* But there is an irony in this procession as well.
  + For this procession of death was unexpectedly passing by the creator of life.
    - They had no faith in him; they may have had little knowledge of him at all.
    - So, they walked past him with no expectation of him at all, probably not even noticing he was there.
  + But Jesus noticed them. Luke tells us that Jesus:
    - “Saw her”
      * The Lord of all things saw her grief, her solitude, her hopeless estate.
    - But more than that, we read that He “Had compassion on her”
      * The Greek word here indicates an intense emotional response as his heart goes out to her.
      * Literally means he was deeply moved toward her.
  + But compassion without action leads to nothing, so He “Steps out his procession and enters hers”
    - Though the body on the cot is unclean in every way, Jesus steps up, stops the procession, and touches the bier on which the body laid.
      * And at this point, everyone on this roadway going in both directions is watching, wondering what’s going on.
  + And then Jesus “Restores life to her son”
    - The giver of life, gives life.
  + Leading to Jesus’ last action: *and Jesus gave him to his mother.*
    - Life restored, joy restored, hope restored.

Two processions, two ironies, two outcomes.

* In the first procession, people went out ahead of Jesus both literally and figuratively.
  + Rather than let Jesus be who He was and fulfill His own purpose, they placed on Him their expectations.
    - They demanded that Jesus fit their mold and be what they wanted Him to be.
    - But He refused, so in the end they were disillusioned and finally disowned him, ironically becoming the very instrument of the death that would set people free.
      * But they would miss it.
      * Or as Jesus put it on that first Palm Sunday:

*42 “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes... 44 because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

* How different that response was from the people in that second procession outside of Nain.
  + Rather than running ahead of Jesus, having all kinds of demands and expectations for Him, this was the group that had walked toward Jesus with no demands or expectations at all.
    - Instead, they brought with them only the reality of their hopelessness and grief.
      * Totally aware of the bleakness of their own situation for which there was no human answer.
  + So Jesus, in His own sovereign compassion and initiative, stepped into their helplessness and brought life – unexpected life – and a frighteningly joyful awareness of Who this was:
    - Vs. 16 reads:

*16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited His people”.*

Isn’t it strange that we celebrate the first of these processions, but not the second one?

* Every year when we come to Palm Sunday, I am struck by how odd it is that we join in a celebration that in the end was so misguided.
  + The only reason the people were declaring, *Hosanna in the Highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* is because they were expecting Jesus to do something that he was not going to do.
* Yet, I would venture to say that this may have been the first time some of you have ever heard the story of the second procession.
  + We don’t celebrate it, even though it is a perfect picture of what Christ has come to do for each one of us: the giver of life conquering death itself.

But maybe we are looking at this all wrong. Maybe we should take a cue from the Scriptures themselves as to what’s going on here.

* For in both stories, a word is used to describe the event that none of us ever use: *visitation*.
  + Jesus said, that those on the road to Jerusalem that day *did not know the time of [their] visitation.*
  + While the people who experienced the resurrection on the road from Nain declared: *God has visited His people!*
* While we focus on the event – the procession, what the people around Jesus are doing.
  + God focuses on what HE is doing.
  + He is giving opportunity, stepping into our world, providing a way to new life.
* Viewed from that perspective, then the Procession of Palm Sunday was an utter disaster, while the procession of Nain was actually the great Triumph.
  + For Jesus grieved over the first procession as they *missed the day of God’s visitation.*
  + But rejoiced with those who recognized and responded to the moment God visited them.
* But we celebrate the first procession and are practically unaware of the second.

Strange, isn’t it?

And what’s stranger still is that we often times still tend to look at Jesus through our own set of expectations rather than allowing him to be Who He is.

* Like the procession on Palm Sunday, we often run out ahead of Him, excited about everything we think He should be doing.
  + We tell him what we think he should do…
  + We tell others what we think he should say…
  + Forgetting that those who try to shape the Messiah into their own image in order to fulfill their own priorities…
    - Are the same folks who in the end are disillusioned when Jesus doesn’t live into to their short-sighted, self-centered expectations.
* Instead, perhaps we should take the example of the widow of Nain to heart.
  + Instead of running out ahead of Jesus with her expectations.
    - She walked toward Jesus with nothing other than her grief.
    - She shared nothing more with him than her need.
    - And demanded nothing from Him, but just walking toward him.
* And Jesus *saw her*, Jesus *cared for her*, Jesus *reached out to her*, and Jesus *gave life to her*.
  + In short, Jesus *visited* her.
    - All by his own initiative.
    - All in keeping with His own purpose.
    - All because His plan is bigger than ours.

Friends, is today the day of your visitation?

* In the words of an old hymn:

*Once to every man and nation*

*Comes the moment to decide,*

*In the strife of truth with falsehood,*

*For the good or evil side;*

*Some great cause, God's new Messiah,*

*Offering each the bloom or blight,*

*And the choice goes by forever*

*Twixt that darkness and that light.*

* + In other words, don’t let the day of God’s visitation pass without humbling yourself and turning to Him.
    - By His grace and sovereignty, He choses to give you opportunity – the moment to step into His grace.
  + Without pride or expectation; without demands or conditions.
    - Like the widow of Nain, bearing nothing but our griefs and bleakness before Him.
    - And finding the frightening joy of His grace.

In 2 Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul writes of your day of God’s visitation when he says:

*1…together with [Christ], then, we appeal to you not to miss the grace of God. 2 For he says,*

*“In a favorable time I listened to you,*

*and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”*

*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

* Today is your day of God’s visitation.
  + Will you walk to Him empty-handed and find life?
  + Or will you miss it?