

**March 12, 2017**  
**Randy Newswanger**  
**Everywhere he goes**

Luke 19:41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup>saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!

During Lent we are following the final week of the ministry of Jesus. We are in the middle of the story. Jesus has spent the past 3 years teaching, preaching, healing, and confronting religious systems. He has a group who follow him everywhere he goes. Some of his follower may have experienced the Roman imposition of social order which sometimes destroyed whole towns due to rebellions. Jesus childhood home was only a few miles from a small city completely razed by the army just before his birth. Perhaps his father, a carpenter, or other relatives had helped rebuild that city a day's walk away. Maybe he had cousins who fled that city and moved back to their village during the turmoil. The governor, Herod, sometimes called "Herod The Great", represented the Roman empire and had embarked on a massive building project of a new temple platform in Jerusalem along with a new city by the sea. That's why he was called "The Great". But those projects were paid for by heavy taxes which were collected through the temple in Jerusalem. The farmers and fisherfolk didn't call him Great. In our time we still disagree whether building projects like large walls will make our country great, or whether global hospitality, and taking in refugees makes us great.

At the time of Jesus, large landowners were prohibited by law from buying small plots of land. The rules were intended to protect the ability of families to grow their own food. But, of course, there are ways for the powerful to skirt around the edges of the rules. The wealthy landowners would loan the peasant landowners money to plant crops, and when the crops failed, would confiscate the land. And the peasants became laborers. The food bank here in Lancaster, along with federal food programs, and school lunch programs tell me that our society hasn't completely solved the problem of how everyone can be fed. We have some systems in place, but there are still hungry people.

We are in the middle of the story. Herod is gone, and a new governor, Pilate, is in control. Just yesterday was the procession of Jesus on a donkey, a celebration, and leaving to a Bethany for the night. You may recall that the procession started with Jesus asking his disciples to go find a donkey tied up and take it for him. And I bet, if you're sitting in this room this morning, you're the kind of person who would have noticed, at the end of the day, when everyone else was heading for Bethany, that no one had returned the donkey. And you'd be the kind of responsible person to do that. And if you arrived late for supper in Bethany you might be a little resentful. And you might get to sleep a little late. And you might wake up tired. Sort of like today. And Now, in the story, you are following Jesus everywhere he goes. Back to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem; A city that figures both as a symbol of the people of God, as well as the center of worship, and the location of political power. The people have been remembering for 1000 years the glory days of King David and yearning for a return of a peaceable kingdom. Jesus has spent 3 years teaching about the Kingdom of God. Jesus quotes prophets of 500 or 600 years earlier who lived during the times when the people had been exiled from Jerusalem, then were able to return. And two centuries before Jesus,

the people had wrested political control of the city from outside empires, but lost that battle to the Romans a century ago. And the prophets that Jesus is quoting had a message that justice is more important to God than the right religious ritual. But Jerusalem is THE PLACE for the right religious rituals.

People are streaming into Jerusalem to pay their temple taxes, to visit relatives, to make animals sacred and give them as gifts to God. This is where the high priest represents the people to God on this one day a year. On the other days, the high priest represents the people to the Roman Governor. Most Jewish men living outside of Jerusalem, across the whole Mediterranean region, would voluntarily pay to the temple of what might be two days wages.

Jerusalem is the ancient city, the center of worship, the holder of relations with Rome, and the symbol of God's connection to people. If you're looking for a place to make a symbolic action, Jerusalem is the place.

And as he approaches the city, Jesus weeps.

Jesus has been proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near. In the kingdom of God, the sorrowful, the peacemakers, and the meek are comforted, blessed, and will inherit the earth. Jesus has been preaching that love comes before religious ritual. So that when he comes to Jerusalem, he sees the symbolic city, and he weeps, We might imagine him weeping for the displaced peasants, or the destroyed towns. Perhaps he weeps to see the hundreds of thousands of people who love the city as he does, or the beauty of humanity streaming in from the countryside.

We might weep for children whose water is poisoned with lead.

We might weep over bodies in the streets.

We might weep for cures that are available, but inaccessible due to cost.

We might weep with beautiful music or art and not even know why.

Where are we weeping? Pay attention. Paying attention to what makes us weep might tell us where you want to follow Jesus in placing love before social rules and religious rituals.

So Jesus enters Jerusalem with some combination of distress, hope, sadness, anger, rage, or expectation. He goes up to the hill toward the temple and arrives at the huge court where anyone can be. Herod had expanded the temple platform so there was a huge gathering area for people; an open-air market for buying the animals to be given as gifts to God, or changing your currency into temple gold to leave an offering. And since this is the celebration of Passover, with hundreds of thousands of people coming into the city, there are Roman soldiers all around. Pilate made his procession into Jerusalem the day before, along with his show of military might, specifically to remind everyone that rebellion is hopeless.

Oh, there's a good question. Is rebellion hopeless? Is the present order as good as it can be? Can you buy your own comforts when others are suffering? Do we need security more than everyone needs justice?

Sorry, I got distracted. We are in the middle of a story. Jesus is in the courtyard where anyone can be, with money changers and animal sellers and some of his followers. On this day, he's not here to discuss the law with the teachers. He's not here to preach. He's here to take action. He makes a disruption. He makes a ruckus. He overturns some tables. He tries to interrupt ordinary business. But on the one hand, the disruption is a failure. Jesus and his followers can't stick around too long. The soldiers will impose

order. And after upsetting the tables and scattering some coins, they leave. I'm sure it wasn't long before normal order was restored. But on the other hand, we are still telling this story. Was the disruption a success? It may have been the amount of disruption necessary to get noticed.

Our current society has its own injustices. It's not always clear how much disruption is necessary for an injustice to be heard.

People have been pointing out growing economic inequality for some time. But the Occupy movement, which placed actual bodies in public places, and sometimes caused disruptions, raised the awareness to new levels.

The Black Lives Matter movement hasn't been saying anything new about systemic violence against black bodies, but they have been turning enough tables to get noticed in a new way.

We also have the example of flash mobs. You may have seen video spread across social media which show the apparent spontaneous eruptions of music, dance, art or beauty.

You may be following the news of The Stand to stop the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline. This week the barn on the property was condemned, and then un-condemned. The Stand is making enough of a ruckus to be newsworthy multiple times this week.

We are still in the middle of the story, both now, and then. But I want to make one final historical detour. The writer of the story we are following today, the writer of the book of Luke, was writing 50 to 70 years after Jesus. We aren't exactly sure when, but sometime after the year 70.

You might remember that one of the followers of Jesus was Simon the Zealot. In the year 66, the Zealots succeeded in overtaking Jerusalem, deposing the high priest, and installing a new one. The Roman response spent three years suppressing rebellion in the countryside and then turned to Jerusalem. When Jerusalem was defeated in the year 70, the temple was destroyed and the surviving people were taken as slaves. It's possible that more than a million people died while the Romans re-exerted control over the territory. So that when the writer of Luke imagines Jesus approaching Jerusalem and weeping, you might imagine the response of the people hearing this story. There is no temple. There is no Jerusalem. The symbol and the city have been erased. For Jesus to weep, for the people to weep, it's not just injustice, but total destruction of the city, the temple, and the symbol. For Jews, that was the end of the temple ritual, and the beginning of synagogue as the center of religious life.

Unfortunately, destruction of whole cities in war is still happening; Aleppo, and other cities in Syria, towns in Iraq and Afghanistan, villages in Yemen or Pakistan where American bombs have landed. There is weeping and more weeping.

But still, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is at hand. The sorrowful, the peacemakers, and the meek are comforted, blessed, and will inherit the earth. Old prophets and new prophets call for justice.

We are in the middle of our story. When is disruption useful? When is an eruption of beauty, dance, or music called for? When is action right, even if it's not polite? We have 4 more Sundays before Easter. Are following Jesus everywhere he goes?