

“Gall and Glory”  
Luke 19:28-40; Luke 23:32-43  
April 14, 2019  
Rev. David Hutchinson

Every April 15 -- at 10:00pm --

-- on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue -- in New York City --

-- on the steps of the MAIN POST OFFICE --

-- a huge FESTIVAL occurred!

At least that's how it used to be -- during the years I lived there in the 1990s.

April 15 of course -- is TAX day.

AND -- every year on the evening of tax day -- there was -- this -- PARTY.

I don't know of any other city than New York - where this happened on this scale.

Though there may have been some others...I don't know...but in New York...

As it got closer to the MIDNIGHT deadline -- the steps of the post office would fill with people -- there were concession stands -- people selling hot dogs -- even a guy selling Tax Day T-Shirts! / A radio station was broadcast -- live -- on location -- from the steps.

Outside -- people were everywhere.

Inside -- there was MORE chaos!

Special tables were set up with tax forms piled on them. / People with calculators frantically worked on their returns. / Postal employees pushed huge bins around marked: “Federal, State, and Local”. / The midnight postmark deadline -- looming.

This was long before E-filing -- so things have probably changed now.

But I remember -- at the time -- going there just to witness it.

I was a student and didn't have taxes to pay yet.

But I remember it...

OUTSIDE there was a party - - INSIDE people were serious and somber.

It was strange.

And in a similar - - and strange way - - in this morning's scripture reading from Luke chapter 19 - - the crowd almost acts like - - they don't know what is going to happen to Jesus in just a few days...

The deadline is getting closer - - and closer...

And yet today - - we begin this remembrance of Jesus' last week - - with palm branches.

Luke says the crowd rejoiced! / And today we rejoice too!

They shouted: "Glory to God in the highest!"

And yet once inside Jerusalem - - the mood will become serious.

In four chapters - - Jesus will hang between two criminals.

One of whom will ask Jesus:

"Remember me - - when you come into your kingdom"

BUT - - as OPPOSITE as these two MOODS are - - they go together.

Did you know that a bunch of 25 palm branches - - when they're all together as they grow on a tree - - the bunch is called a "CROWN"? / I learned that once from a florist. /

And of course Jesus crown - - was a crown of thorns...

Do you see how these opposites - - go together?

William Penn once wrote it this way:

"No pain, no palm - - no thorns, no throne - -

- - no GALL, no GLORY - - no cross, no crown".

So today -- as we begin our Holy Week journey to Easter -- we'll try to hold them together as well: Gall and Glory.

It's the only way to really remember -- the whole story.

There have been a lot of movies devoted to remembering difficult, painful and violent things.

Mudbound, Dunkirk, Vice, Chappaquiddick, Cold Mountain, Hotel Rwanda  
Lincoln, Argo, Django, Zero Dark Thirty, Black Hawk Down.

I could go on...

Remembering difficult things is almost a preoccupation.

Maybe it's an attempt to try to make sense of life.

Lincoln and Django remember the violence of slavery in very different ways.

Argo and Zero Dark Thirty remember American responses to terrorism.

And these movies do more than simply recount events, but rather, they are some kind of search for meaning in the midst of the moral challenges that life presents in the midst of terrorist violence, and racist violence. And I would say, in the midst of our own human violence.

If you don't think human beings have a deep propensity toward violence I don't know what to say to you. Except maybe, go see some of these movies. Which by the way are NOT easy to watch. And they only scratch the surface. Similar movies have been made about the violence of homophobia, violence against women, the Holocaust, and so on.

If you are willing to grant - however - that humans do have this *painfully problematic propensity*, and I would say I agree with you, then I would also say, that is why we need the cross. That is where the meaning of the cross is found. And it is where resurrection begins.

Movies are only one way to remember.

There are historic sites devoted to remembering violent events.

I have been to the holocaust museum in Dachau.

I remember standing on the site of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s grave, which is located in the midst of a reflecting pool, outside Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

War memorials can be found in nearly every city and town in America.

And even to this day, when I drive by the sites of personal tragedies, I remember them.

Many of us visit grave sites on memorial days, or clear out closets after someone dies.

Or don't.

In this morning's scripture reading, a criminal hangs on a cross, on either side of Jesus.

And one of them says to Jesus, "Remember me, when you come into your Kingdom".

Remember me.

Remembering is not an easy thing to do.

And it can sometimes dis-member us.

We can remember violence in ways that glorify violence.

Remembering can be done wrongly.

But it can also be done rightly.

BUT - - - why bring all this up?!

Isn't it best forgotten?

James Cone responds to this question: "absolutely not."

God took the evil of the cross and entered into it...

...and transformed it.

As I read this and reflect on it, I am convinced of a couple of things.

Here are two:

1. The violence of the cross is NOT about the nature of God.
2. The violence of the cross IS about the nature of human evil and sin.

God is not violent by nature, but humans often are.

And so here's a third thing I'm convinced of:

3. the loving - - all merciful nature of God connects  
with the worst of human sin.

God can be found - - even there.

The loving and life giving nature of God - - connects - -

- - with human frailty and human mortality and death - -

God can be found - - even there.

And the second criminal on the cross next to Jesus gets that!

He gets it, while facing his own death.

And while facing his own sin.

And "Paradise" has the last word.

"Paradise" IS the last word in this scripture reading.

Think about the relief Jesus might be feeling - - as he rides into Jerusalem.

He is nearing the end of his journey.

There really IS something GLORIOUS about it all.

There really IS a PROMISE - - wrapped up in all this.

Somehow - - the parade of palms IS a GLIMPSE of the RESURRECTION!

Maybe Jesus is exhausted - - but at least the anticipation is now over.

As I think about the crowd - - watching Jesus that day - - from the sides of the road - -

I wonder about us.

If we were to walk the streets of St. Helens - - what stories would there be?

What things would we remember?

What stories would we tell?

On Palm Sunday there are TWO stories to tell:

The story of pain and struggle...

And the story - - of joyous praise.

These stories go together.

They are stories that must be - - remembered.

I'm sure that no human mind remembers events like a camera or tape recorder.

I'm sure there is no objective account of history.

So part of ANY act of remembering is to ask:

What do we remember, and what do we forget?

In the course of my wrestling with all this, I came across a poem.

The poem is called "Forgetfulness".

It helped me to think about a person with Alzheimer's at the end of life.

And it helped me think about my mother, and my own memories.

And somehow it also connected me to the mercy of the cross.

The mercy...of the cross.

I'll end with the poem...

“Forgetfulness” by Billy Collins:

The name of the author is the first to go  
followed obediently by the title, the plot,  
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel  
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,  
never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor  
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,  
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye  
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,  
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,

something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,  
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember,  
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,  
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river  
whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall,  
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those  
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night  
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.  
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted  
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.