

Luke 19:29–40 (CEB)

²⁹ As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. ³⁰ He said, “Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If someone asks, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say, ‘Its master needs it.’” ³² Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said.

³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “Its master needs it.” ³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. ³⁶ As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.

³⁷ As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. ³⁸ They said,

“Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!”

⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout.”

Luke 20:45–21:4 (CEB)

⁴⁵ In the presence of all the people, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ “Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They love being greeted with honor in the markets. They long for the places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. ⁴⁷ They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly.”

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people throwing their gifts into the collection box for the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow throw in two small copper coins worth a penny. ³ He said, “I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than them all. ⁴ All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had to live on.”

Sometimes commitment means giving it all.

Two people. One is the King of Kings, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the Creator of the Cosmos, the Lord God Almighty. The other, a nobody. Literally. We don’t even know her name. But both are fully committed. Both are prepared to give it all . . . and they do.

A freedom party

I bet you like a good party as much as I do. Who doesn’t? And that Sunday in Jerusalem was supposed to be the beginning of the biggest and best party ever. A celebration of salvation. A freedom party. The arrival of the most amazing gift of all – God’s rescue of Israel from the oppressors and the pagans.

You see, it was Passover Week. Every spring, Jews from all over converged on Jerusalem for this festival. It had been instituted by the LORD God Almighty more than a thousand years before. Ever since, God’s people had remembered and participated in the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt as they gathered in homes on a spring evening each year.

And this year promised to be the Passover to top all Passovers, for God was about to do his big thing. The time had come. The day had arrived for the keeping of all the

promises God had made through his prophets. And it would start with one man from Galilee.

It seemed almost impossible to believe, there had been so many disappointments. But the momentum had been building. Crowds had escorted this man, Jesus was his name, through Jericho, not far from Jerusalem. There, Jesus had brought salvation even to a hated tax collector named Zacchaeus. It seemed that everyone, really everyone, was invited to participate in this party.

And now Jesus had arrived at Jerusalem and was preparing to wrap himself in all the messianic symbols available. No one was to misunderstand the meaning of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

The arrival

Years ago, my family and I saw the Broadway revival of Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*. The musical is set in the Iowa town of River City around the turn of the twentieth century. In one scene, the whole town turns out to await the arrival of the Wells Fargo wagon, the weekly UPS truck of the day. No telling what treasures were on that wagon. What dreams would be answered when the wagon stopped and unloaded its cargo?

Messiahs and Kings

There are certain keys to understanding the Gospels. One of these is the relationship between our understandings of messiah, king, and God.

To a first-century Jew, Jesus' claim to be the Messiah was to say that he was God's King, the one who would inaugurate the coming of God's kingdom. Claiming to be the Messiah was not a claim to be God. There was no sense of divinity in the Jewish understanding of the Messiah. Though Jesus was assuredly God and Messiah, no Jew of his day would have put those two concepts together.

The Jews of Jesus' day were waiting for just such a Wells Fargo wagon. And what would be on that wagon when it arrived? It would carry a Messiah, who would arrive in all power and might and wonder and glory in order to throw out the pagan oppressors and cleanse the temple, restoring it to a proper dwelling place of God. The wagon would carry all the nations of the world who would stream to Jerusalem to acknowledge and worship the LORD God. The wagon would carry all those who had died and would now be resurrected, re-embodied to new life. Sons would embrace their long-dead grandmothers and mothers would meet their children who had died during birth. There would be no more tears, except of joy. There would be no death and no mourning, no wars and violence, no hatred or arrogance, no privilege nor division. All would live in peace, enjoying a renewed and restored land, worshiping without end the one who had made them and who was now making all things new.

That was the wagon the crowds thought they were welcoming on that Sunday in Jerusalem. The work was over; the party was just about to get rolling.

Of course, five days later, all those expectations had been dashed against a rock called Golgotha. Most turned away, hoping to pick the right wagon another time. Even after the Sunday morning of the empty tomb, only a few believed that they had welcomed God's wagon after all. They had no conception of a Messiah who would be asked to give it all, even his life . . . but he did.

Contrasts

To juxtapose two things is to place them side-by-side, especially in order to contrast and compare them. That is just what Luke does in today's passage.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem to the waving of palms. He has wept over the city, knowing where things are headed. He has been to the temple, where, invoking the words and actions of Jeremiah, he has pronounced warnings against the temple, the nation, and

all those who refuse to embrace Jesus and the path that he has laid before them. In response to all this, groups have come forward to trap Jesus in a mistake. The Pharisees have tried to trap him over the question of taxes. The Sadducees have tried to trap him over the question of the resurrection. Others have tried to use David's words against him. Now, a crowd is gathered around Jesus and his disciples as they sit in the temple courtyard. The stakes could not be higher.

Perhaps a little melodramatically, Jesus raises his voice so that everyone can hear him. He is ostensibly teaching his disciples, but he wants to make sure that no one misses a thing. Jesus draws the crowd's attention to scribes walking through the temple. How they love to walk around so that all can see their importance. How they love the best seats, the places of honor, the deferential greetings – all as they consume the property of widows. One could hardly paint a more compelling picture of the worst in human pride and greed.

Then Jesus draws the crowd's attention to the chests in which visitors could place their temple offerings.¹ The rich were stopping by to drop in their gifts and Luke is clear that these are non-obligatory contributions. But Jesus points the listening crowd to a woman, a poor widow,² who drops two "lepta" in one of the chests. A lepta was the smallest value coin, equivalent to about 1/128th of the average daily wage. In a pointed comment, Jesus says that the rich gave out of their "left-overs" (from J. Nolland's translation), whereas the widow dropped in all that she had. In contrast to the gifts of the rich, the widow has made hers out of a passionate and wholehearted commitment.

A committed heart

Everyone grows into somebody. The only question is what sort of somebody. In the temple courtyard, Jesus draws a stark contrast. On the one hand, the scribes have allowed their many talents and their successes to grab hold of their hearts, turning them inward. They live for the trappings and privileges of the elite, perhaps blind to the harm they do. Indeed, at best, they have grown to be morally and spiritually blind; at worst, they have grown to be calculating exploiters of the weak.

We know nothing of the widow's life, but we do know that she has grown to have a heart that is passionately devoted to God's cause. She is destitute in a way that you and I can't imagine. There is no Social Security or Medicare. All she has is a couple of nearly worthless coins, yet she offers them to God. There is no reason to think she is a fool. She must know that her two lepta will make zero difference to the temple. But she knows that she gives not based upon what the temple needs, nor even what God needs, but out of her own need, her own faithful heart's need to give generously. It is her heart that matters, not her household budget.

Is money really the point here? Of course not. Jesus is contrasting the hearts of the scribes and the rich with the heart of this lone widow. But Jesus also knows, as the crowd knows, that how people handle their money is a concrete expression of what they most value, where their hearts are. And there could be no more concrete demonstration of a committed, outwardly-focused heart than the widow dropping in the two nearly worthless coins. It is the concrete expression of her love for God, a love that encompasses her heart, mind, soul, and strength.

The scribes grew to be people focused inwardly, focused upon themselves. The rich gave only token gifts, ensuring that their own social status would stay intact. But the widow – despite her hardships -- gave no concern to herself, but gave all she had for the benefit of others. This ought to remind us that none of us have been saved solely for our own benefit. We have been restored to a right relationship with God so that we

¹Josephus, writer of a late first-century Jewish history, reports that there were thirteen collection chests located in the Court of the Women in the temple courtyards. Each chest was designated for a different use.

²Widows were at the bottom of the social ladder and epitomized the needy. Under the Law of Moses, the Jews were obligated to look after the needs of widows and orphans.

may extend God's mercy and caring to others. We are to love God and love neighbor. Do we? Are we really committed to the Jesus and the work of his kingdom? How would someone know?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. It is very easy to go from Palm Sunday right into Easter and ignore Maundy Thursday (Jesus' Last Supper) and Good Friday (Jesus' crucifixion). What would you tell someone who asked you why it is called "Good Friday"? After all, it is the day that Jesus was killed. What could be good about that?
2. Palm Sunday was not an ending but a beginning. The disciples may have thought that their journey is over, their work done. But they were only getting started. In the same way, when we come to faith in Christ, it is a beginning. Talk about where you are on your journey and how you are living out Jesus' commission to be his witnesses, to make disciples, to feed, and to clothe?
3. The story of the widow is not about money, it is a story of the heart. The hearts of the scribes and the rich had turned inward. But the widow's heart was consumed with her love of God and neighbor. Spend some time discussing this story. Feel free to use your imagination! What sort of person do you imagine the widow to have been?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: Luke takes us through Holy Week

Monday, Luke 19:29-48 Jesus enters Jerusalem and heads for the temple.

Tuesday, Luke 20:1-21:4 Jesus confronts the authorities.

Wednesday, Luke 21:5-38 The coming confrontation with Rome and the fate of the temple

Thursday, Luke 22:1-38 As the authorities plot to kill him, Jesus shares the Passover meal with his disciples.

Friday, Luke 22:39-23:25 Jesus prays in the garden and then is arrested and tried.

Saturday, Luke 23:26-56 Jesus is crucified, dies, and is buried.

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are beginning a study of Paul's letter, 1 Thessalonians

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the Gospel of Luke

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

This week: *The Last Days of Jesus*