

Tears over Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-34)

This would have been a strange sight, as Luke tells it. At the height of the moment when you'd expect to find Jesus happy, he wept instead. In fact, there's a great deal of emotional jostling in this account—the joyous outburst of disciples, the indignation of Pharisees, and the sorrow of Jesus. This moment marked a different approach for Jesus, who, as we've seen in other gospels, particularly Mark, tended to downplay his messianic identity. Yet here, in this moment, he went to great lengths to specifically fulfill the prophetic word of Zechariah who described Jerusalem's coming king entering the city on a donkey, the symbol of peace. Here then Jesus claimed his messianic role, and, whether or not they knew of Zechariah's prophecy, the gathered crowd of followers erupted in spontaneous praise of God heralding Jesus as the king coming in the name of the Lord—they publicly acknowledging and affirming his claim. That this was so is confirmed in the recorded rebuke of Jesus by the Pharisees who directed him to rebuke his disciples for their praise. His reply to them indicated that there are moments so significant, so sublime in the divine order when God cannot be denied due praise, that were human voices silenced, nature itself would find a voice to rightfully praise God.

And yet, despite the acclaim, Jesus wept. Approaching the city which had for centuries been revered by Jews as the center of faith, the place of God's dwelling in the city's magnificent Temple, the very joy of Jewish imagination, Jesus, peering down the corridors of time saw its tragic end—the city and its Temple in ruin as the result of Rome's brute force crushing rebellion—it would happen in one generation's time. The peace they proclaimed that day, echoing the angelic host at his birth, would elude them once more, because they did not recognize the time of God's coming to them. What moves Jesus to sorrow? This. When people squander the opportunity for peace, Jesus weeps.

On the face of it, one would think the opposite was true—it seemed that people, at least those praising God that day were, in fact, recognizing the time of God's coming to them. What else would account for their acclaim? Luke provides a clue in verse 37. As the crowd responded to this moment, they praised God for all the miracles they had seen. Jesus had that reputation, a worker of miracles, a healer, a person who raises the dead to life again. Miracles are amazing and breath-taking and certainly praise-worthy. But in and of themselves, miracles were not the point of Jesus' ministry. They established his credibility as one through whom God worked. They conveyed the benevolent nature of God towards them, that God was a God who cared about their wholeness and well-being, a God who could be relied upon in the face of challenge over which they had no power, a God who was not only with them, but for them. People were understandably drawn to Jesus because of this, but miracles were not the main event in Jesus' work. They were incidental to his primary work of proclaiming the reality of God's kingdom and its immediate availability to them. Miracles prompted the public thought, "look what we get from the hand of God." Whereas the focus of Jesus' work was more along the lines of "look who you become through the love of God."

Would that day have changed for Jesus had the crowd praised God for the teaching they had received, the insight they had gained into God's character and purpose for them, by what they had become by what they learned? Had that been the case, perhaps the crowd itself would have rebuked the Pharisees for their indignation. Perhaps that sentiment would have carried on through the events of the following week where the crowd of disciples stood up to the rulers challenging them with the idea that Jesus should be their champion rather than their antagonist. How might that have shifted the developing picture of Jerusalem's destiny? We'll never know, because despite appearances, the people and their leaders did not recognize the time of God's coming to them.

As painful as that assessment is, it rings true—it's still happening in our day. Which is not to say that this is uniformly true in all places among all people. There are those who recognize the time of God coming to them, but the measure of its truth is determined by the presence of peace in our world, our communities, our neighborhoods, our homes, and by that standard we can know that we've not yet arrived at full recognition. The world as it is, is not the world as it was designed nor what is envisioned. We remain a work in progress, and despite

the joy that undergirds our life as followers of Jesus, if we're genuine in our commitment to Christ as Lord, we like him, will find ourselves weeping even as we plead in prayer and serve with grace towards the outcome God envisions.

The assessment rings true in our day—we live in a conflicted world where some recognize the time of God's coming to us, but others do not. Why is this? Primarily because people see either what they want to see or what they are prepared to see. And this is largely due to the pre-suppositions one holds about the world and our place in it.

It's no secret that we live in an age driven by a scientific/empirical worldview, meaning that reality is determined by what can be seen, studied, dissected, and quantified. In this view we are primarily accidents of existence that march through time adapting to its contingencies, exploring our habitat, mining its resources to serve our interests in the interest of survival. In this view, the strong survive, so we capitalize on our strengths, leveraging our assets to secure our position so that we can enjoy what we've acquired. It isn't as bleak as it sounds—culture nurtures beauty and advancements in knowledge produce broad human benefits; systems of government and society safeguard against malignant impulses for the most part. But all of this also breeds a competitive spirit defining winners and losers prompting us to lean in the direction of winners even when that dynamic damages people in the process. In the scientific/empirical worldview you have only yourself to rely upon—there is nothing larger than ourselves stewarding creation. The idea of God in this view, as the late Stephen Hawking declared, is for people who are afraid of the dark. A more cynical view of it considers religion, broadly defined, as a means of controlling others, which ironically, is the one thing Jesus and the God he revealed refuse to do. People see what they want to see, and if they have categorically dismissed the idea of God, there is nothing of God for them to recognize in the time of God's coming to them.

On the other hand, people also see what they are prepared to see. In 2013, cable TV personality Tarek El-Moussa received a note from a viewer who noticed a lump in his neck on an episode of his show Flip or Flop. The viewer advised him to get it checked. That lump turned out to be thyroid cancer since removed leaving him cancer free. The viewer who sent the note was a nurse who noticed something she was prepared, by training, to see. Similarly, those who are open to the idea of God, those who prepare, or train themselves spiritually, stand a good chance of recognizing the time of God's coming to them. Richard Beck, a professor of psychology at Abilene Christian University in Texas has just released a book that argues for the recovery of a more enchanted worldview. He doesn't envision a world of unicorns and leprechauns, but one that recognizes an entire spiritual cosmology, that we live within a larger context of reality from which we've received our capacity and drive for life, and with which our human spirit is able to interact and thrive.

Clearly this is the cosmology that defined the worldview of Jesus and within which his teaching is rightly understood and makes sense. Here humans are intentionally created beings formed in the image of God, for the express purpose of fellowship with God, and our highest purpose in life centers around our capability of reflecting God's glory in inexhaustible variety as expressions of God's creative genius and purposeful love experienced in a reciprocal relationship with God and shared in solidarity with women and men everywhere. This is the pathway to peace. Followers of Jesus live in the dynamic energy of God's life transforming our inner life to match the inner life of Jesus so that we live in his peace, the assurance of God's love for us that keeps us in all situations and sustains us in our efforts. Jesus wept on the road to Jerusalem, but he kept going knowing that as he gave up his life, we would gain ours.

Now, as Dallas Willard helpfully reminds us, we don't just drift into that kind of discipleship. We make concerted efforts to inform our understanding about the kind of God Jesus revealed and we train ourselves to pay attention to what matters to God. People matter to God, particularly broken people who have been crushed by life. You see, God is in the restoration business, and God leans into whatever contributes to wholeness. God is fiercely protective of the weak and vulnerable on account of the helplessness they experience, but God exercises that protection through women and men who share that concern, who will come alongside them and help them up, and who, by their resources and creativity will find ways to

dissemble the structures of oppression and replace them with avenues of opportunity. This is the emptying of self for the sake of filling others—exactly the exchange Christ modeled and encouraged. When we are prepared to see, we will recognize the time—here meaning opportune moment—of God’s coming, for we will see the character of God actively pursuing the purpose of God—the enrichment of the human spirit to receive and believe the mind of Christ, along with a heart longing for and welcoming peace, and know by its outcome that it is God personally at work to bring it about. AMEN