

4.14.19 Palm Sunday**The Land of Went The Gospel of Luke 19.28-40 (NIV)****Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Holy week begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday and ends on Easter with the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. In between those two events, so much of significance takes place that nearly one third of Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels are spent dealing with the last week of Jesus' life. Almost 50% of the Gospel of John covers the experiences of this tumultuous week. It's difficult to overstate how much the final week of Jesus' earthly life has impacted human history ever since. I think of Holy Week as the week that changed the world. Among those present in Jerusalem all those years ago, who could've imagined how Christ would be regarded centuries and even thousands of years later around the entire world? Certainly not his disciples or those who saw him as he made his way to the gate of the city of Jerusalem and as he passed through its narrow streets. Not the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council, who questioned him or the Romans who condemned, flogged, and crucified him, or those who stood by and mocked him as he died. Not those who loved him and who wept in grief and horror at his death.

We stand on the other side of the cross and the empty tomb so we experience Holy Week very differently than those who didn't know how the story ended. The significant events of those few days: Jesus entry into Jerusalem, his escalating encounters with the powerful, sharing the Passover with his closest followers in the Upper Room, praying in anguish in Gethsemane, his arrest and sham of a trial before both the religious and political authorities, and the horror of his torture and execution – we read and hear about all these things with the knowledge of the empty tomb and the resurrection, but those who were living those days didn't have the benefit of what we know so let's try to enter into Luke's version of Palm Sunday as if for the first time.

"28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 *"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter*

it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32 **Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.** 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, *"Why are you untying the colt?"* 34 They replied, *"The Lord needs it."* 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, *"Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"* 40 *"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."*

How would you have felt if you had been one of the disciples Jesus told to go get the colt and bring it to him? I wonder what those two disciples who were charged with securing Jesus' ride for the trip into the city were thinking in the time **after** receiving their instructions from Jesus about what they were supposed to do, and **before** finding the colt, *"just as he had told them."* I wonder what they were thinking while they were in **the Land of Went**. Perhaps they were wondering, *"How are we supposed to know which colt is the right one if there's more than one? If no one has ever ridden it, how are we supposed to walk it or control it? What if someone thinks we're stealing their horse and attacks us?"* There are all kinds of questions that could have been going through their minds in the time between receiving Jesus' instructions and seeing them fulfilled. Regardless of any questions, doubts, or fears, **they went** and did what Jesus told them to do. By doing so, they were faithful to what the Lord told them and they became, even if we don't know their names, part of God's drama of salvation that's re-told every year. Those who were **sent went and found it** as he had told them. That tells us we worship a God who can be trusted. A God we can depend on. This is the story of faith we find throughout the pages of the Bible.

Things looked bleak in Genesis 6:5f when *“The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.”* Things haven’t improved much since then either. God instructs Noah to build an ark and to gather two of every kind of animal. That was a tougher assignment than walking into a village to find one colt. The Lord told Noah that a flood was going to wipe out everything that lived on the earth and promised to begin again with Noah and his descendants. Noah likely endured a lot of abuse from neighbors, but he believed God could be trusted and he went and did what he was told and everything unfolded as God said it would. In Hebrews 11:7 we’re reminded, *“**By faith Noah**, warned by God about events as yet unseen, **respected the warning** and **built an ark** to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance **with faith**.”* Noah trusted God and when he was sent to do a job, he went in faith and did it and God was with him.

In Genesis 12:1-2, *“the LORD said to Abram, **Go** from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that **I will show you**. **2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you**, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”* When Abram was sent, he went, as he had been told. Hebrews 11:8 tells us, *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; **and he set out, not knowing where he was going**.”* Some of you know what it’s like to drive or travel with someone like Abram.

The entire 11th chapter of Hebrews details the lives of people God sent and they went. Hebrews 11:32-34, *“And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— **who through faith** conquered kingdoms, administered justice, **obtained promises**, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **won strength out of weakness**, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”*

On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples take their place in the long line of faithful people who won strength out of weakness by responding to God’s word with obedience, trusting that God would be with them Jesus, in an act of courage and quiet

strength, openly enters the city of Jerusalem even though he knows there are people seeking to kill him. **Jesus was sent and he went as he had been told.** Those who follow Jesus also went when they were sent.

Just as Jesus and the disciples went when they were sent, we also are called to go when God sends us and to step out in faith. In the Gospel story it only seems moments between the time they were sent, went, and found the colt. But as they disciples walked into town, as deep as their trust in Jesus may have been, if they were anything like us, they had a discussion about how they were going to find the correct colt. While they walked and talked they were in **The Land of Went.** They were only there a short while, but in the course of our lives we find ourselves in the Land of Went more than once, and often for long periods of time, even for years.

The Land of Went is the place between Sent and Found. The Land of Went is the place we find ourselves after we've been sent, but before we've found what we're looking for, before we've accomplished our objective. It's the place between Promise and Fulfillment, between Planting and Harvest, between "Go," and "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Land of Went is the Land of Faith because it's there, in the meantime, in the interim, that our faith and trust are put to the test. Our answer when God sends us, determines how much God is able to do in us and through us. In Mark 6 when Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth they rejected him and Mark says (6:5-6), ***"And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief."*** Our response whether of faith and trust or rejection and disbelief, can either open us to God's power and presence or limit God's ability to move in our lives.

The Land of Went is the land of trusting in God's presence as we journey. Jesus tells the disciples to go and they go, **Yes, Lord. Period.** When we get into trouble is when we say, *"Yes, Lord, comma. Yes, Lord, but..."* **We need a faith of periods, not commas. We need a faith of "Yes, Lord," not "Yes, but."** The kind of faith that's

found throughout the Gospels. In Luke 5:20, four men bring their friend to Jesus and **“When he saw their faith**, he said, *“Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”* And the man was healed. In Luke 8:48, Jesus said to a woman who had sought for healing for years without success, *“Daughter, **your faith** has made you well; go in peace.”* Mark 10:51–52 tells us that shortly before arriving at Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a blind man named Bartimaeus. “Jesus said to him, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* The blind man said to him, *“My teacher, let me see again.”* Jesus said to him, *“Go; **your faith** has made you well.”* Immediately he regained his sight **and followed him on the way.”** **The Land of Went is the land of trust and obedience. The Land of Went is also the land of Waiting.** There’s always a delay when we knock on a door, before a person answers it. If we desperately wanted to see someone we would not merely knock softly and then, if there wasn’t a response within a few seconds conclude they weren’t home. We’d knock some more. If it was an emergency, we’d knock repeatedly and loudly until we got a response. Still, that means we have to wait.

Christ tells us we’re to approach God in prayer with patient perseverance. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ invited his closest followers to join him in persevering in prayer. They failed the test and subsequently failed in obedience. Jesus was faithful in prayer when he was in the Land of Went and that enabled him to go with faith and courage to the cross where he was sent. **Patient perseverance means we don’t give up while we’re waiting.** We want to know, *“How long do I have to put up with this? How much longer can this go on? When will it end?”* It’s understandable that we have these questions. In a convenience and consumer-based culture of instant everything, 24 hour banking, fast food, cell phones, and delivery of anything we want in less than a day, it can be hard when we find ourselves in the land of Went where we’re on God’s terms and God’s time. We prefer an Amazon Prime/Fed Ex version of Christianity rather than a faith that grows and matures over time.

As we think about the Land of Went and how it’s a land of faith and trust, there’s one last thing for us to remember. Even though the Land of Went is a place of faith, that doesn’t mean life is going to be easy, without pain, loss, suffering and even death.

Jesus' faithfulness led him to a cross. Again it's in Hebrews 11:36-40 where we hear how hard the road can be in the Land of Went. *"Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect."*

In other words, some people live their entire lives in the Land of Went, in a place between sending and finding, between promise and fulfillment, never receiving what was promised. Moses was in the Land of Went for most of his life. He got to see the Promised Land, but he didn't get to enter it. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the night before he was murdered, said, *"I've been to the mountain top, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but we as a people will get to the Promised Land."* In the providence of God, it is only through the faithfulness of those journeying through the Land of Went that others will be included in the family of God.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem at the beginning of what we now call Holy Week, he knew that the end was near. Perhaps he wondered what would happen with his disciples and if they'd be faithful or fall away when he was gone. Yet he was sent so he went as he had been told, trusting that in God's time, God's will would be accomplished. That takes courage. When John F. Kennedy was running for president in 1960, he made an appearance at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. There were hundreds of people there and he had another engagement to get to so he asked the mayor J. Edwin Kuykendall if there was a back door he could use to escape the media crush. The mayor replied, *"If there had been a back door, there wouldn't have been any heroes."*

On that first Palm Sunday, **Jesus trusted** God and was a profile in courage as he confronted the greatest challenge anyone can face. **The disciples trusted** Christ enough that when he sent them, they went, expecting to find the colt as Jesus said. **The**

owner of the colt trusted God and had his priorities in order so that when he heard that the Lord needed something that was in his power to give, **he gave without hesitation.**

When we become followers of Christ, we open ourselves up to a whole new world of possibilities. When we're sent, we need to go. Jesus sent them, and they went, and they found it, as he had told them.

Blessing: May we all hear the Lord speaking to us and encouraging us to respond in faith and trust his call to go wherever he sends us and to do whatever task we're given in Christ's name.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. How do you feel about Palm Sunday? Is Palm Sunday a day of good news or bad news? Why?
2. What did Jesus think was going to happen on a Passover trip to Jerusalem?
3. How would you have felt if you'd been one of the disciples Jesus told to go get the colt and bring it to him? What would you have been concerned about?
4. How does the crowd's temporary joy about Jesus mirror our own times? What's the difference between cheering Jesus and following Jesus?
5. The "Land of Went" is the place we find ourselves between being told something by the Lord and seeing it fulfilled. It is a place of trust, obedience, and waiting. How do we "keep the faith" when we're in the "Land of Went" and have not yet seen the fulfillment of what was promised or the realization of hope?
6. What can you do to have a meaningful Holy Week as you journey with Christ each day?