

Daughters of Jerusalem, a sermon for Maundy Thursday in response to Luke 23:26-33, by Rev. Scot McCachren for Hilltop Church, Mendham, NJ, March 28, 2024 (B Maundy).

Ever since Jesus showed up on Sunday, nothing has happened like any expected it to. But today has been an especially long, loud, and bewildering day in Jerusalem. ... There are **so many** visitors for Passover – a lot more than usual! ... Crowds nearly *rioting*. ... Rumors of *violence* – of some kind of uprising. ... Guards running from place-to-place yelling threats and orders to the crowd. ... +++ ... There’s an ominous sense of ***danger*** in the air. +++ +++ Just five days ago, some of the women in the streets – (the ones Jesus calls “Daughters of Jerusalem” in one of tonight’s readings) – these poor, powerless Jewish women, had joyously welcomed Jesus into the city with palm branches – shouting Hosannah! They had ***heard*** so many promising about him – about how he was going to change **everything**... They had also heard about Jesus’ exciting new message – ***heard*** of his miracles – ***heard*** that he could drive out demons and even raise the dead. And now – finally – he had come here where ***they*** lived... he had come to Jerusalem! It had been such a thrilling day when he came into the city. Sunday had been such a glorious day – a day filled with so much promise.

But now, looking back, it’s hard to believe that was just a few days ago. ... What a week it’s been! ... Those same “Daughters of Jerusalem” watched Jesus drive moneychangers from the Temple – **boldly** – **angrily** – (he acted like he **owned** the place) ... They listened to him argue with the high priests and elders about justice, ... about loving neighbors, ... and about the word of God – +++ and they understood that he was on **their** side. He wanted them to be free and joyful. +++ They had heard his parables in the temple that made them think about their own lives – their own priorities. And they had actually **seen** him heal sick people on the streets. +++ **What a man!** +++

But unfortunately, just now, these same women had seen Jesus’ trial. They heard the Roman governor, Pilate himself, declare, “I find no fault with this man, so I will release him.” ... But then things had gotten out of control. ... Lies were shouted. ... A riot began. *Pushing, screaming*. ... Pilate tried to ***insist*** the man is innocent..., but a chant broke out: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” +++ And then Pilate gave in. ... Everything came crashing down. Jesus is condemned to be crucified – and it’s going to happen immediately – RIGHT NOW! +++ The women can’t believe what they are seeing. **He is innocent! Don’t kill him!!** ... +++ +++

Now, Jesus is led right past them on the street, with *hundreds* of people following. They can see that he has been severely **beaten** – he can barely walk. +++ **And their hearts break** ... their hearts break in **sympathy** for Jesus – it’s just too much to bear. +++ They are ***overcome*** by their emotions. ... So, just as he passes by, they weep aloud. – +++ Jesus ***hears*** them. +++ He ***stops***. +++ He looks at them, with tears streaming down their faces. +++ And he says something very surprising...

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Let’s pause the scene right there..., to remember a very similar moment. – ***Another*** time when Jesus was pressed by a multitude of people from every direction – when he ***also*** said something surprising. Luke tells us in Chapter 8, “a woman, having a **flow of blood for** twelve years, came from behind and ***touched*** the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. **And** Jesus said, “Who touched Me? ... Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.” The woman came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him the reason she had touched Him and how she had been healed immediately. And He had said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; **your faith** has made you well. Go in peace.” Her simple, humble, **faith** in the holy power of Jesus Christ had healed her. She was saved... +++ +++ **Both** scenes could be right out of a movie – one of those moments when all the other action around two people blurs to a halt, frozen in time, while the two are intently focused, only on each other – and the camera circles around them. } } +++ Amid **hundreds** of people pushing and pulling, ... +++ the simple act of touching his garment – ***or NOW***, crying out for him in mourning – +++ takes Jesus’ full attention. ... And perhaps, ... just ***perhaps***, ... (thinks the reader), ... these women of Jerusalem will ***also*** be blessed – they will be delivered from their **own** sorrows, by a Jesus who is grateful for their tears... Wouldn’t that be marvelous!?

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Now, back to our scene – just as Jesus passes by, the women weep aloud. – +++ Jesus *hears* them. +++ He *stops*. +++ He looks at them, with tears streaming down their faces. +++ And he says something very surprising... +++ “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’ ... Then they will begin ‘to say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”’ +++ +++ Despite their earnest tears for him, Jesus does nothing to make them feel better. He’s not saying “I appreciate your concern, but there’s no need to worry about me. I’ll be fine.” No, instead, he’s actually *warning* them.... **THEY**, and others like them, are the ones in danger – **not him!!**

Why would Jesus turn and say that to these women who are crying for him, as he stumbles his way through the streets to his own crucifixion? +++ Why would **Luke** include it? +++ Why is Jesus’ response so different here than when the bleeding woman touched his garment? +++ All good questions – to ponder – on.

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BUT, let’s think about these questions with another question: Why had Jesus come to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? +++ **He had not come to win ANYONE’s sympathy – or their tears.** – +++ He came to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom of God. +++ He came to Jerusalem so that Israel could see, and believe, that God is there among them, making a new covenant of salvation. Jesus *came* to die on the cross. +++ To redeem humanity. +++ He came to save these Daughters of Jerusalem – and even at his own execution, he is still trying to get through to them. +++ +++ But, after seeing ... and hearing ... for themselves everything he’s done this week, ... all they can muster ... is sympathy. +++ It’s all they have. +++ They haven’t believed in who he is. They haven’t wanted what he is offering – a brand New Covenant with their Creator. +++ And so, they have no faith... for what is about to happen next over the next three days. +++ +++ **They are stuck.**

Luke put all of this into a larger context for us a few chapters before. Jesus had *warned* of Jerusalem’s punishment for failing to receive the Son of God: “They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you... because you did not recognize the time of your visitation with God.” That’s why Jesus tells the women a time is coming when people will say, “**Blessed** are the barren wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!” Jerusalem would pay a price. +++ And, by the time Luke was written, Rome **had destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews**. His contemporary Hebrew-Christian readers would not miss the reference. +++ But the point of Christ’s message is not about punishment. +++ It’s not about Rome or the physical destruction of Jerusalem. It does, though, drive home how important it is for God’s people to hear... and have faith... that Jesus Christ IS the new fulfillment of God’s promise. Those who hear and follow Christ ARE the NEW Israel. +++

SO – let’s not feel sympathy for Christ tonight. – Let’s have faith in his love and gratitude for his sacrifice – especially at this darkest hour. +++ Rather than CRYING, like the Daughters of Jerusalem, **Luke calls us to PICK UP THE CROSS AND CARRY IT, like Simon of Cyrene**. +++ Quite, ... simple, ... faithful. +++ For us, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are days of somber faith. +++ Days of loss – yes – but also days of hope. +++ **Tonight** ... we don’t see the glory with our *eyes*; we don’t *hear* the hallelujahs with our *ears*. **Tonight** ... +++ we remember an arrest, ... a trial, ... denial, ... weeping. +++ **And THAT’S the night to declare our faith** in this condemned peasant from Galilee. +++ To declare who WE are. +++ The GOOD NEWS is: We have a Savior who is worthy of our faith. ... A Savior who gives us confidence, even when he is dead and buried, ... that a new day will dawn in his truth. +++ **Don’t weep for Jesus.** ... Wait. ... Watch. ... Believe – that – a new day ... is *just* around the corner.

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Go to Choir – Gethsemane Hymn