

Getting Into Position

April 9, 2017

Luke 19: 37-40

³⁷ When Jesus was starting down the Mount of Olives, his large crowd of disciples were happy and praised God because of all the miracles they had seen. ³⁸ They shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God." ³⁹ Some Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, make your disciples stop shouting!" ⁴⁰ But Jesus answered, "If they keep quiet, these stones will start shouting."

Mark 14:32-37

³² Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he told them, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ Jesus took along Peter, James, and John. He was sad and troubled and ³⁴ told them, "I am so sad that I feel as if I am dying. Stay here and keep awake with me." ³⁵⁻³⁶ Jesus walked on a little way. Then he knelt down on the ground and prayed, "Father, if it is possible, don't let this happen to me! Father, you can do anything. Don't make me suffer by having me drink from this cup. But do what you want, and not what I want." ³⁷ When Jesus came back and found the disciples sleeping, he said to Simon Peter, "Are you asleep? Can't you stay awake for just one hour?"

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Pastor John

Our two scripture passages today bookend Holy Week. The first passage, from Luke, celebrates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The ministry that Jesus has shared with the people and His disciples leads them to joyfully praise God. The people were

gathering to celebrate the Passover, but this is a spontaneous outburst to Jesus' arrival. In Luke's gospel, the people shout, "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God*". There is a segment of the population who does see Jesus as the Messiah, as the anointed one who comes on behalf of God to save the people. As we will see in about a week, on Easter Sunday, this segment of the crowd was correct. Jesus came to save the world. But there are others in the crowd who are a bit less convinced. The Pharisees are worried about earthly matters and plead with Jesus to quiet His disciples and followers. They are worried about how the Romans might react to the gathering crowd and the raucous cheering. They are probably also worried that their power might slip away as Jesus becomes more popular and as more and more people choose to follow Him.



Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God.



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How often these are our concerns as well! We can gather here on Sunday morning and proclaim our faith and sing our praises to God. We can shout out our "Hosannas" and be enveloped in the moment, just like those followers and disciples were along that road that led into the city. And we can find time and space and quiet time in our homes each day as we read our Bibles and lift up our prayers to God. These moments can also be sacred and can lead us to praise and worship the Lord our God. But the concerns of the world can also creep in. Maybe it is when we walk out the door Sunday morning or maybe it is even during our time of prayer at home. Earthly matters can rise up to consume our focus and our attention and our efforts. We can also worry about what proclaiming our faith and living it out

might cause with those around us – what they might think or say. We can worry about losing popularity or status or power if we live out our faith too loudly at work or at school or wherever. How often the concerns of the Pharisees are our concerns as well.

Jesus hears the Pharisees request to quiet the crowd and says, “*If they keep quiet, these stones will start shouting*”. In His own way, Jesus was saying that there is no way to deny who or what He is. Jesus was saying that the very earth will cry out and proclaim His glory if the peoples’ voices were to fall silent. Yet if we are honest, at times the concerns do get to us. The concerns will cause us to be silent, to not live out our faith. Sometimes our voices do fall silent.

Sometimes, our lives do not shout out the glory of the Lord. But creation is never silent. That is what Jesus is saying here. The sunrise and sunset proclaim His glory. The thunder and lightning proclaim the power of God. The song of the birds lifts the beauty of creation up on the breeze, exalting the Creator. All of creation is constantly proclaiming the glory of the Lord. But at times we fall silent.

The challenge that I have been giving you for the past few weeks has been to invite three friends to come to church with you on Easter Sunday. This is a hard thing that I am asking you to do. I realize that. It is hard for me to do too. Just like you, I know that I am called to live into the call to ‘bring people to Christ’. I sense the need to do this because I know that the life that I live now as a Christian is so much better than the life I lived when I was not a follower of

Christ. You also know the change that has occurred in your life after you accepted Jesus as Lord. The hope and peace and comfort and strength and forgiveness and grace that I receive from Jesus is such a huge part of my life now and of who I am at my core. The experience of being here in worship with all of you recharges my batteries, refreshes my soul, prepares me for the week ahead. The connection to God in this place draws me here. This picture shows the emotion and the spiritual connections we know so well when we come and worship the Lord. There is joy and praise and exultation in our connection to God. You too have experienced all of this. All of that is what we have to share with those who are broken and lost and hurting. It is what we can offer and share by inviting those on our sticky notes to come to church next Sunday.



Yet even though we know all of this and even though we deeply value our personal relationship with Christ, it is still hard to invite others. It is out of our comfort zone. It scares us. It causes anxiety and sweat and butterflies for most of us to just think about inviting someone to come with us to church. But the reality is that when we allow those other voices to win, we are succumbing to lies. When we allow the voices of the world and the voice of Satan to convince us that we cannot do what we know we are called to do, then we are saying that we do not think that God can or will be there to help us. It is a hard thing to invite others, but it is possible. When we trust in the lead and guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we are assured that God will lead and guide us. Now, to alleviate the mood, please turn your attention to the screens for a look at how NOT to invite someone to church. [Play video.]

When we invite someone to anything, whether it is to come to church or to come over for dinner or to go for a hike, it should be natural and part of a normal conversation. It should simply be an honest and sincere invitation.



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Hopefully you have been praying for the Spirit's guidance and direction and strength to help you be invitational. Our devotional book speaks to this. The prayer focus for this week is attentiveness and expectancy. In being attentive in our prayers, we are making the intentional choice to hone in on what we are bringing before God and to pay attention to what God offers back to us. We are giving God our undivided attention so that we can best receive from God. Being attentive also includes being aware of how God is at work in our lives. It is my hope and prayer, that through my attentiveness in prayer and through God's guidance in my life, that God will work in and through me to bring others to faith in Christ. The second part of our prayer practice this week is expectancy. We are being called to pray expecting an answer. I pray expecting that God will lead and guide me to say and do what will bring Him honor and glory this week. It is my hope and prayer for all of you as well. If we pray with attentiveness and with expectancy, we are positioning ourselves to hear from God and for God to be at work in our lives. It is from this place of hope and expectancy that we now go to the Lord in prayer, asking and expecting God to be at work in us and through us. Again, please follow the prompts as they apply to you. Let us pray.

[hands for those who have asked, then hands for those who are praying...]

We are praying for God to do a work in and through us to help bring others to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, to take hold of a personal relationship with Jesus. Over the last few weeks, we have focused in on the idea of being in community and of growing and maturing together in our faith. We are wired as human beings to be in community. Through experience we see that our faith journeys are better when we walk the road together. I say all of this to help us realize what the next step will be if there are people who come next week and begin to pursue a relationship with Jesus. We saw a glimpse of this at the end of the Skit Guys video. What if they say 'yes' when we ask them to come to church with us? We cannot slowly back away. We need to engage.

Well, if someone says yes and comes to church, it leads to the second part of our mission statement. The second part is right back there on the wall and right there on the cover of your bulletin. Now, maybe some of you may be thinking that I should wait until after Easter to talk about this. When we invite someone to come with us to church, we are inviting them in hopes that they will come to personally know Jesus. When we invite them to come to know Jesus, we are



inviting them into our community of faith. When we invite them into our community, we know that we will need to walk alongside them as they grow and mature in their faith and relationship with Jesus. They will have questions. They will struggle. There will be doubts. We all had these things once. Transformation can be hard. It can be difficult. It can be challenging. It was for us once upon

a time. When we invite someone into this place and to seek a relationship with Jesus, we are committing to help them to come and know the faith we have. "To help people grow deep in Christ". That is our mission.



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Returning to our scriptures for today, the first passage recalls Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Our second passage picks up the story just before Jesus is arrested. In between these two events, Jesus has been busy. He has cleared the temple and has spent time teaching in the temple. The religious leaders have questioned his authority and He has, in turn, condemned their self-righteous practices. Jesus has spoken about the time when He will return and has shared that no one knows the time or day when that will happen. He has gathered his disciples in the upper room and there He instituted the Lord's Supper. He has informed Judas that he will betray Him and has informed Peter that he will deny Jesus. At night, Jesus goes with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that they will come to arrest Him there. And He knows what will follow His arrest.

This is the scene as we turn to in our second scripture reading for today, from Luke 19. There, in the Garden, He has asked His disciples to pray for Him. I imagine they could sense the inner turmoil that Jesus was wrestling with. Then He took the inner three – Peter, James, and John – and went a little further. Jesus confesses His struggle to them, saying, "*I am so sad that I feel as if I am dying*". You can just feel the weight of the world on Jesus' shoulders. This is one of the most 'human' moments we have with Jesus. The passage then goes

on and Jesus asks the inner three to keep awake with Him. Then verse 35 reads, *“Jesus walked on a little way. Then he knelt down on the ground and prayed”*. As I envision Jesus doing this, I too get a sense of His inner struggle.

Jesus walked on
a little way.
Then he knelt
down on the
ground and
prayed.

The joy and excitement of Palm Sunday are behind Him and Jesus knows what lies just ahead. Jesus is struggling with what He knows is coming. We can feel this as He says, *“Father, if it is possible, don’t let this happen to me! Father, you can do anything. Don’t make me suffer by having me drink from this cup”*.

Father, if it is
possible, don’t let
this happen to me...
Don’t make me
suffer by having me
drink from this cup.

He is saying, *‘Please Father, please; please, no Father. Not this’*. It is a very human side of Jesus that we see here. It is the side of us that rises up when we know we should reach across the aisle or walk across the yard to invite that neighbor or friend to come to church. It is that human side of us that rises up when we feel the nudge of the Holy Spirit and we balk. It is that human side of us that rises up when we hear the whisper of the Spirit and we refuse to follow.

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And then Jesus gains control of himself. He masters the inner fear, the doubts, the need to protect self. I can picture Jesus lifting His eyes towards heaven as He says, *“But do what you want, and not what I want”*. Another translation reads, *“Not what I will, but what You will”*. Jesus acknowledges that His purpose is to do the will of God. Jesus gets into position to do what He has come to do. Soon He finds the

disciples sleeping again. And soon they will come to arrest Him and the terrible process will begin. Jesus asks them, "*Can't you stay awake for just one hour?*" as He returns to them, ready to face what lies ahead.

We also know what lies ahead for Jesus. We know the events that will unfold this week as we move from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday into Good Friday and eventually to Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. As we move through Holy Week, may we live into the words of Jesus: "*Not what I will, but what You will*". May our lives this week be a reflection of and an invitation to Jesus, allowing others to come to know Him as well. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When have you most joyfully celebrated Jesus in your life? How can you use this experience to draw others to Christ?
- 2) How can you pray with *attentiveness* and *expectancy* this week? What do you hope for or *expect* in your prayers this week?
- 3) Spend some time in prayer, asking "*Not what I will, but what You will*". Where might this lead you this week?