

Call to Worship Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents.

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

Prayer of Invocation

As we pray for the gift of your presence, O Christ, we come before you in honest humanness this day. We acknowledge together our communal need for forgiveness from that which keeps us in bondage. We lift our faces, our hearts, and our voices to you, with hope and trust. In humble faith, we do pray that we will know you here, O God. Intrude into our lives this day. Amen.

The Word

Mark 11: 1-10

When Jesus and his followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. **Jesus gave two disciples a task, saying to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.'"**

They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. **Some people standing around said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone.**

They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and he sat on it. Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. **Those in front of him and those following were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!"**

Living the Word "Approaching with Humility"

This is where it all begins to come together. The uphill climb of this journey has peaked at the top of Mount Olivet; then the descent into the Kidron Valley and final ascent up Mount Zion and into Jerusalem. It has been a long journey thus far, but now the steps quicken as the destination is in sight.

Today the trip to Jerusalem reaches the point where we begin seriously to consider the cross and the resurrection that waits on the other side of this week. The annual family trip to remember and celebrate Moses' story of saving his people, we now remember and celebrate as Jesus' story of saving all people, in this lifetime and throughout eternity.

The excitement and awe of seeing the city ahead, has now turned to a humble reverence for who God is for these people. I wonder if we approach Easter with the same humility? Actually what does it look like to be humble in today's world? As I rolled it all around in my head this week, my first reaction is that entering the week being humble is the opposite of coming into the week being bold. Somehow my processes of humility would be to be meek.

Yet Jesus, though he entered on a donkey, a fairly humble ride, went straight to the Temple and threw over the tables of the corrupt merchants. Surely the tension was building, yet that wasn't a humble move, but a bold move.

COVID -19 has certainly put tension in the air right now. Some of us are finding it difficult to live with the changes that are being forced on us. This week I heard a Walmart story that happened here in Hayward. A woman with a fairly full cart, turned away to pick out another item and while her back was turned, a man came by and took the toilet paper out of her cart and put it in his own.

This was observed by a third person who confronted the man about what he had done. The man boldly said "What are you going to do about it?" The third person reached into the man's cart and took the toilet paper and put it back in the woman's cart. Now that was a bold move, yet done out of justice.

I once hear John Pollock, a 27 year coach for Girl's High School Basketball say, "winning is an opportunity to feel pride and joy in the work an athlete has put in to achieve;" then he spoke of losing – "losing is an opportunity to experience and know humility and to then strive for perseverance." I realized that it does take perseverance to stay humble as well as to move beyond a loss. It also takes courage and boldness to persevere.

He ended with this statement: "to be a top competitor you also have to be "mentally tough." Then it all clicked for me. Jesus wasn't bold enough to throw over tables because he was angry at his situation. He was bold out of the justice that he wanted for God's Temple to be holy and not a den of thieves. He was humbling himself to be bold for God. That is only a part of the mental toughness it took for him to face the cross as he rode that donkey into the city.

When we approach God, do we do it with humility? It is now time for the travelers to make their preparations to enter the holy city to worship their God. What were they now to do? What were they to say? The gates of the city were now before them and they were about to enter, so they were given ancient words in Psalm 131 to say which could express their feelings. The words are those of a song of humility. How else could they approach God?

"O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me."

They had just finished singing Psalm 130, *"I cry out to you from the depths, LORD - my Lord, listen to my voice! Let your ears pay close attention to my request for mercy! If you kept track of sins, LORD— my Lord, who would stand a chance? But forgiveness is with you—that's why you are honored. I hope, LORD. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. My whole being waits for my Lord— more than the night watch waits for morning; yes, more than the night watch waits for morning!"*

And then they had made that great statement of their faith with the assurance that their sins were forgiven: *"Israel, wait for the LORD! Because faithful love is with the LORD; because great redemption is with our God! He is the one who will redeem Israel from all its sin."*

And now they repeat in their hearts something like this, as David must have when he wrote it: "Lord, since I have been forgiven and counted as so precious in your eyes I just lay back in your everlasting arms and rest there. But you know Lord, that I do not feel worthy of all that.

I am a king before you, I know that; but I am a king because you have made me a king, for I did not earn it. But I am not haughty about it. You know that, because you know me. You know that I accept this kingship humbly, I am not trying to be more than I am. You know this Lord, for you know my heart. Do you know what I feel like? I feel like a weaned child resting quietly. My soul is calm within me."

Throughout history some have felt that this Psalm – 131, should not have been included as the writer sounds too proud of his humility. But we need to understand that these are the words of someone well connected with God and used to talking about everything with the Lord. He doesn't care what people may think of him. This is a matter between him and his God, and he knows that God knows his heart and his praises to God are sincere and large.

David had written this psalm and how appropriate it was for him when the 'ark of the covenant' was taken into Jerusalem, for there he did an astonishing thing. In front of his whole entourage, in front of a mass of people going up to Jerusalem who were going up to Jerusalem with him, he took off his clothes, all of his royal attire, and asked one of the priests to let him wear one of his cloaks, and there, in front of that mass of people, he danced with all his might, and shouted and sang with the sounds of the trumpets that were being blown. It is obvious that he did not care at this point what anyone thought of him. When he – the anointed representative of God's chosen nation – was praising God, what did it matter what some people thought?

His wife Michal, who had been watching the proceedings out of the palace window as David danced his way to the city gates, was so embarrassed over it that record states she despised him for what he had done. Later that day when David came home, he was elated over the proceedings of the day.

But that elation was not to last. Michal confronted him and said to him something like this "Well, you certainly made a fool of yourself today, undressing before your army and the maidens of your servants, and dancing like a vulgar person shamelessly uncovering yourself."

David said back to her: "Just who do you think you are talking to? I am the king, whom God has chosen to be king! I did not undress and dance for the people! I did it for the Lord, who made me king! I did this to praise God! And I will make merry before the Lord whenever I wish, for it is between me and the Lord that these things were done today.

And because you feel contempt towards me because of what I did this day between the Lord and myself, let it be known to you that you will never again be my wife so that you will never have to be ashamed of what I will do again." And it was so. They never lived together again.

Knowing David and his sensitivity, how easily hurt he could be, we wonder if he didn't go from that confrontation to the balcony in his palace and look out over the landscape and think to himself as he had once written in Psalm 55:6 *"I say to myself, I wish I had wings like a dove! I'd fly away and rest."*

Why is it Lord that a day which begins so well, with so much joy and elation...why is it that such a day so often has to end so badly? And back to 131 – “I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me, do I? My heart was not lifted too high, was it? My eyes were not raised too high, were they?”

In Jesus we had another king, called the Son of David, who knew that God had put all things in his hands. Both were aware that they had been chosen to be kings by God, and as kings they both served God in their own way. David danced into Jerusalem, Jesus rode a donkey as the people danced around him. Both humbled themselves before God in an act that seemed out of the ordinary to the world around them. Because they were doing it for God, it was really just between their God and themselves and no one else mattered.

When a person can humble themselves in the way they feel is right before God, they can go on to say “I have calmed and quieted my soul like one who has been fed directly from my God and now am able to respond on my own, because I know God’s desire for me and God knows my heart.”

Here is a person who can now journey next to God always in the glow of God’s love, knowing they were raised on the gifts of fruit blessings that God has nurtured them in. We want the security of being loved! Like a weaned child that is still held close and thus quieted, so to, we want this for our souls. I am quieted by being loved by God, not because he feeds me, but because he loves me.

So David was quieted as a weaned child is quieted. But for Jesus, the Son of David, it was not for him! It was for his followers, his children, but not for him! He was the Lord who would have to quiet his children. We see that in the garden of that fateful night. Jesus went into the garden one last time, seeking to be quieted by his Father, but His Father was not there. He asked God to let this cup pass from him, yet he still asked for God’s will, not his own. Jesus was humble in his asking and also humble enough to know God was still loving him through it all.

Jesus had become a little child again in that garden, calling out to his Father, yet even after an angel came to strengthen him, he sweat tears of blood. It was because of Christ’s bold humility that he could face the cross. He knew that he had to make the next steps of this journey alone, to the cross - to the tomb, for us to know that he is the parent to whom we can go, to be quieted and loved. And as a mother stills the heart of her weaned child, so Christ can still our hearts.