

April 1, 07 6th Sunday of Lent John 12:12-19

“V” Is For Victory

Now a days when sports teams win games they point a finger in the air telling the world they are number one. Tomorrow night Ohio State and Florida will face of for the NCAA Championship. The winner will cut down the nets, taking turns and saving a piece of the twine to remind them of what they accomplished. When they get back to their campus there will be celebrations as the campus will come out to celebrate this great feat.

Years ago it wasn't a finger lifted in the air to celebrate a victory. Instead it was the “V” sign. Winston Churchill used to flash his two fingers in the air letting everyone know that victory had been accomplished. After that many used the “V” sign. “V” is for victory.

When the Chicago White Sox won the world series a few years ago they paraded down the streets of Chicago. When John Glenn was the first American in space there was a parade to honor him. When the troops of WWI and WWII came home following their victories they were honored with ticket tape parades. So parades are great. They are a way to honor our heroes for what they accomplished.

Parades are formed for all kinds of reasons. When the circus comes to town there is a parade. When the Cubs win the World Series this year there will be a huge parade in Chicago.

Well this morning we heard about a parade that we hear about every year. This is the Sunday that brings the earthly life of Jesus to an end. For most of his ministry he kind of avoided the spotlight. But on this day it was different. On this day he was about to tell the world who he was. How did he do it? Well listen to John's account of the day we call Palm Sunday. **READ JOHN 12:12-19**

Can you imagine the excitement that must have been in Jerusalem as the people were preparing to celebrate the annual Passover Feast? The city was filled with people of all kinds who came to make their annual pilgrimage to the Holy City as required by their religious law. The money changers in the Temple were doing a great business. Some of them cheated the people. So Jesus cleanses the Temple. He drives out the cheating money changers and others because they had made this house of prayer a den of thieves. And folks, the money changers and religious leaders were not happy with Jesus.

So what do we learn from this Palm Sunday story?

First, I believe it tells us **Jesus was prepared for this day**. On this Sunday there was excitement in the town. When you look at the Scriptures you find Jesus had prepared for this day. He told his disciples what they needed to do. He told them to find a donkey and bring it to him. He was ready now for the world to see who he really was and why he had come to this earth. So all things were ready. The donkey was ready. The city was ready. Jesus was ready. The disciples were ready. The people were ready. The time was now.

This scene reminds me of a Gaither chorus that says, *“O the King is coming, the King is coming! I just heard the trumpets sound, and now His face I see. O the King is coming, the King is coming! Praise God, He’s coming for me!”*

We know the story well. People line the road and spread their clothes and palms in the road as Jesus comes riding by them on the back of a donkey while the people shout their praises. For around 33 years of his life he was trying to stay in the background. Yet, what he did could not be quieted. How many lives he touched can never be known. But as the Scriptures teach us, many, many were touched in a variety of ways. John wrote, *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But*

these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”

Healings? Too numerous to mention. Raising the dead? Well, a few of those have been recorded. In fact this last raising of a dead person, the calling forth of Lazarus had angered the religious leaders so much that they decided Jesus must go. Spiritual changes? The disciples lives were definitely changed. Then there is the story of how a harlot was transformed when the Jewish leaders were about to stone her to death because she was found in the act of adultery. But they changed their minds. Jesus didn't condemn her, but told her to “go and sin no more.” How about the Samaritan woman who was told about her life and how she had 5 husbands already and the guy she was living with wasn't her husband? She not only found water at the well that day, she found living water and a new life through Jesus. How about Nicodemus? He came out of the darkness into the light of the Gospel message when he came to talk to Jesus at night. He wanted to know many things about who and what Jesus was all about. But Jesus knew Nicodemus' heart. He knew the questions he wasn't asking. So Jesus told him that if he wanted to be part of God's kingdom he had to be “born again from above.” What did he mean? Well, he meant that he had to repent of his sins, believe in Jesus and begin a new life surrendered to Him.

And how about the rich young ruler? This one had a sad ending. He came to Jesus to find how he could have eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all he had and come follow him. But the price of his salvation was too high. He walked away as Jesus watched in sorrow that his wealth was really more important than where he would spend eternity.

Yes, Jesus was prepared for this day, and the days ahead. For the past 3 years his focus was on one thing and one things only: showing the love of God, offering life changes, and ultimately giving his live for the sins of the whole world. His focus was the cross of redemption. As you all know, he didn't twist arms. He just offered people a better life if they would believe and follow him.

Second, **the disciples were ready for this day.** Oh, they didn't know that. These 12 disciples had on the job training for 3 years. One of them was getting ready to betray Jesus. For over 3 years Judas was the money holder. He seems to be the weakest link, so Satan had an easy target getting into Judas' heart. And though Jesus knew what was to happen, he still gave Judas a chance to repent. But as we know, he didn't take him up on the offer.

And then there was Peter. He was to be the strong one. But even he failed the Master. In the end he denied Jesus 3 times. Oh what a sad day that was for him.

Even now the disciples were ready for this day. There wasn't much more that Jesus could teach or show them. They had seen it all. They had heard him preach. They had heard Jesus tell them he was about to face the cross. He had told them that they would be the ones to carry on his ministry. He would tell them that the Holy Spirit would fall upon them and give them boldness. Right now they were as ready as ready could be. Jesus had done all he could.

Finally, **the crowds were ready**. When people in Jerusalem heard Jesus was coming they left the city to welcome his coming. They shouted their praises. They shouted that Jesus was King. They praised God for sending their Messiah.

Yes, the crowds were ready to welcome Jesus into their midst. Some had witnessed first hand some of the miracles. Others believed because of the stories they heard of how he touched so many lives. Others were just curious about this man who was getting all this attention. They were amazed that it was the sinners that Jesus

associated with. He ate with hated tax collectors, lepers, the unloved and those who had been cast away by the religious leaders. He showed them the pure love of God.

That was Sunday and Friday was coming. Some of these same people who lined the parade route, would soon change their tune. On Friday some of those who are praising Jesus with their lips would join other to have Jesus crucified.

Yes, on this Sunday everything was ready. Jesus was ready. The disciples were ready. The crowd was ready.

The celebration began. As the hymn goes, *“Into the city I’d follow the children’s band, waving a branch of the palm tree high in my hand; one of his heralds, yes, I would sing loudest hosannas, “Jesus is King.”*

The last week of Jesus’ life begins with a parade. Maybe he gave a victory sign to the people, though they would not have understood it. He’s enjoying the notoriety. He knows what he is doing. In the entrance way he can see the religious leaders watching as the crowds sing their praises and welcoming this King of kings and Lord of lords into their midst while they, the religious leaders steam, and Jesus smiles. They may have wanted to yell back to the crowds, “He’s not our king. He’s not our Messiah.” Their conversation was not about his kingship,

but how can we get rid of this man? They had decided one man must die because it seems “the whole world had gone after him.”

Jesus comes entering the city, not as a general or warrior, but as a servant of God, a servant bringing the peace and love of God. He’s coming in victory, not over Rome or the religious leaders, but over sin and the grave.

I have one more thing to say this morning about this story. Yes, Jesus was ready. The disciples were ready. The crowd was ready. But for us this morning the greater question is, **are you ready?** Are you ready to declare your love for Jesus? Are you ready to open your heart to him? Are you ready to be his messenger? Are you ready to repent of your sins? Are you ready to declare Jesus as your Savior? Are you ready to walk with him daily?

This communion table reminds us that Friday was coming, and on that Friday he surrendered his life that all who would believe in him could have everlasting life. But that was Friday and Easter Sunday is coming.

This morning you are invited to his table of Grace, the table of victory. For the cross could not hold him, nor could the grave. There is victory in Jesus. Come and receive, and go in victory. Amen!