

The Bulls Eye

Luke 19:28-40

A bullseye is the dead center of a dart board. It's the same for an archery target, the sign of shooting perfection. Pick your sport and there is a bullseye. In bowling, it's hitting in the pocket. With golf or baseball, you aim to hit on the sweet spot. In throwing a football, it's in threading the needle. You can probably think of other examples as well.

Of course, the time it matters most to hit the bullseye is when the game is on the line, when everybody is watching. You want to thread the needle in the Super Bowl, hit the sweet spot at the Masters or in the World Series and it's during March Madness you want to hit nothing but net.

Jesus had one chance to get it right, to show it clearly. He had one opportunity to show the heart of his message, the essence of his faith while in Jerusalem, a most public setting. The Passion story was the earliest section of the Gospel. We now call it Holy Week--the events of Jesus' life from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, then Easter Sunday. This was the first section written and remains the most important.

The first Holy Week began with the events of Palm Sunday, a curious procession that was really quite opposite from a triumphal military parade. I agree with many scholars who see this event as a acted out parable illustrating his message about the nature of God and God's kingdom. The events of holy week followed naturally from this event and culminated in his arrest and crucifixion.

What was this Palm Sunday parade all about as Jesus got closer to Jerusalem and the expectations of those around him grew about the coming of God's Kingdom. At least part of their exciting involved an expectation of overthrowing the Romans and restoring a free and autonomous Israel. Jesus needed to communicate two things. First, yes, the Kingdom was coming and it was all wrapped up in Jesus, in his life, ministry, teaching, and ultimately in what was to happen during Passover week in Jerusalem. As we look back, we also see the coming of the Kingdom all wrapped up in Jesus' death and the events that followed.

The second thing Jesus needed to communicate was that the Kingdom was very different from most people's messianic expectations. Jesus was pretty smart. He realized he could explain this difference till he was blue in the face, but that a small demonstration, an action, would make his point far more clearly and powerfully. He told two of his disciples, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" (Luke 19: 30-31) I really don't know what intrigue lay behind this process of getting the donkey, but they got it and Jesus got on and rode it.

This was a humble parade into Jerusalem, not very majestic. As with much of the telling of Jesus' story, the events of Palm Sunday make more sense against the backdrop of the Hebrew Bible, specifically the book of Zechariah—the next to last book in the Christian Old Testament. The prophet Zechariah lived and was active around the time of the return from Babylonian exile of the Israelites (ca. 520BCE) Zechariah created the image of a triumphant Messiah to inspire the settlers:

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zech. 9:9)

Jesus was acting out this passage. There was an interesting background note that, according to some ancient sources, the donkey in some Eastern traditions was seen as animal of peace. The horse was an animal of war. According to the Babylonian Talmud, “a king came riding upon a horse when he was bent on war and rode upon a donkey when he was coming in peace.”

Again, Zechariah wrote:

“I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.” (Zech. 9:10)

So Jesus rode along, a king riding on a donkey, and people began to throw down their outer robes on the path in front of him. And his disciples sang and shouted praises.

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19: 38)

They were proclaiming peace, yet it's likely that many, if not most, in the crowd were really cheering for action, for a military revolt and an attempted takeover—or at least a show of power. But Jesus would not lose focus. He did not lose his discipline and would not forget his commitment to the task he had chosen. And he rode on as though all of heaven rode with him. Even the stones themselves seemed to shout, “Hosanna!”

Palm Sunday was all about setting a target for Holy Week. So, what about us? What is the bullseye for Crossroads Church? One bullseye is community and hospitality: the value of building relationship to support each other in tough times, encourage each other to strive for growth, enable our community to deal with difficult issues. Another bullseye is spirituality, prayer, meditation, and healing ministry.

There is the bullseye of theology and our commitment that each person has the right and is capable of working out their own beliefs. As a community, we can develop our own theological spectrum and understanding in trust—that we're all on the journey. In community, we get support and guidance, and even some help, in clarifying and answering your deepest questions.

A bullseye is that we live, work, and do ministry according to a sense of God's call, God's invitation, by developing and using our gifts in a rhythm between the inner life and the outer journey. We practice inclusiveness--respect for the journeys of all people in the recognition that we are made stronger by diversity. We believe that each of us reveals the nature of God by being who we are.

One of Crossroads' bullseyes is the use of the arts as a powerful way to reveal God, express God's nature, and even to know God. There is also the bullseye of social justice. We work to make peace in the world and to meet the needs of the hungry, homeless, and hurting in our city and world. There is also the social justice of challenging and changing oppressive social systems and political policies.

There is a final question: “How will we hit that bullseye? How will we give shape to what we want Kansas City to become? Being serious about community building will require work. It will require showing up, participating, and being honest and willing to talk about hard things. We will have to be willing to pray for and embrace the healing we seek--pray for guidance and have the courage to lead--pray and give life to our prayers.

We must be willing to do the hard work of social justice by making ourselves vulnerable to those in need and organizing ourselves to challenge the *powers that be*. To hit the bullseye on social justice means putting our energy, our money, and our passion out front to make our faith tangible and visible, not just in this building, but also in that world.

It's a simple idea. To follow Jesus means to put love into action. To live with love is to know God and to be alive. To accept injustice, racism, sexism, poverty, and war is to remain in death. To accept as normal that African-American youth represent a vastly disproportionate percentage of the population in Kansas City jails is for us to abide in death. But to resist the evil, to fight it and seek to transform it, is to experience resurrection.

The psalmist wrote, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” (Psalm 107:2) Let the congregation of Crossroads Church say so and let all the church in the world say so. We will not let the evil around us stand, but we will follow the way Jesus rode and then walked for peace, with power. Let us commit ourselves to work to shape a world, in here and out there, that reflects the justice, joy, peace, and power of Jesus. Let us shape a world where, in our hearts and in our actions and with our lips, we sing praise to the Lord. Alleluia! Amen.

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²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."