

Cheers and Tears

Luke 19:28-44

As the crowd of disciples reached the summit of the hill, looking down to the city of Jerusalem a mile before them, they were cheering. They were about to enter the city announcing that they had a new King. This was a coronation, a celebration, something to make a noise about. But as the crowds of disciples cheered, the King they were parading was crying.

In Luke 19:28-44, we read about the cheers of the crowds and the tears of the Christ. What made this community of disciples shout for joy? And what made Jesus cry whilst they did that?

We start by reading (again) that Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. Luke's still telling us like a constant throbbing in the mind that Jesus knows He's heading towards His death - the death that was the plan all along. This isn't why He's crying though - we'll get to that later. In vv.29-34, we read about Jesus directing the events that lead to that death. He's in control of all that's coming. And He's choosing all that's coming. Because He's the King. And that's what this whole scene is all about.

The colt and the coats - all of it brought to Jesus, rolled out for Him like a red carpet. His disciples putting their resources at His disposal, all to declare to people in the city and its surrounding villages - 'Here is our King, we're putting our lives in His hands and staking everything on Him.'

In Zechariah 9:9, the prophecy was that the promised King sent by God would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. For this community of disciples to cheer loudly whilst Jesus did this, and to shout out the words of Psalm 118 in v.38, was to say loudly and proudly, spurring each other on: 'Jesus is our King. We're proud of Him. We want everyone to know it.'

This was a defiant cry - the authorities in Jerusalem didn't believe this claim, and they wanted to silence this upstart Jesus and those who identified with Him. But the fear of being silenced was not bigger than their desire to shout aloud. And it's a joyful cry, we read in v.37. It is the celebration of a community of people who are bursting with praise for what they've experienced.

Preaching this in the past, I've asked something like: 'as a community of disciples, how can we make a noise about Jesus that will get people around us talking?' But I reckon the answer is usually, 'Don't know.' So instead of

that rather daunting and difficult question, let's look at the starting point for this noise-making that we read about in v.37.

Three times in half an hour on one morning this week, God told me to *look back to what He has done amongst us* already - in my own Bible reading, in a conversation with someone that followed 5 minutes after that, and then in reading v.37 preparing this sermon.

In v.37, it's when the community of disciples *thinks back* to the miracles they've seen that they start finding their voices. The praise spills out as an overflow of their thankfulness for what Jesus has done amongst them. They saw miracles. They saw impossible things change. They saw powerful works of people being set free in all sorts of ways.

We weren't in the crowds of Galilee and Judea who physically saw Jesus do incredible signs of future wholeness breaking into the present day. But we have seen Jesus change things amongst us - haven't we? So to spur each other on to praise and to making a noise about Jesus that people will notice, let's remind each other of what Jesus has done amongst us.

*What amazing changes has Jesus brought about amongst us?
(In small groups - nobody has to say anything. Leader of each group come with one sentence testimony)*

Our confidence to make a bit more noise about Jesus grows as we reflect on our actual experiences of His goodness to us. These are tangible things that we can tell people about. Real stories of 'Here's what Jesus did for me' or 'here's what Jesus did for people in my church' - the more we pass these things on, the more it might get people in our community talking about it.

So I hope that encourages you with a starting point for the job of making sure people around us are hearing 'Jesus is great.' Because it absolutely *is* our job as His disciples to do that. The kind of praise of Jesus we read about in this passage isn't a compartmentalised activity to share with like minded people behind closed doors one morning. To praise Jesus was to declare how great He is in the hearing of the city and the villages around them.

In v.40, Jesus says that if His disciples don't do this, creation itself will. Jesus won't be left without testimony pointing to Him to say, 'He is God, He is King, He is amazing.' Better that it's His followers that are saying it though. I reckon we've been leaving it to the rocks for too long.

Maybe you, like me, know people who have some kind of belief or even awe about God, because they're blown away by the hills they walk or the stars they stare at. People who say, 'There can't be *nothing*' and think that the *something* that's behind it all is pretty awesome. But nobody's told them 'I know this God - His name is Jesus, and here's some other amazing things He's done - in my life, and on the cross, for you.'

Making Jesus known to other people involves more than saying 'I'm a Christian' or 'I believe in Jesus.' It involves sharing with people 'Here's why I've found Jesus to be brilliant.' So let's start doing more of that, and put some praise - some 'you're amazing Jesus, *because...*' on our lips - not just with each other, but with your friends and families.

One of the things that holds us back from this stuff is worrying about going beyond what is socially acceptable to talk about. The Pharisees, who were the political pressure group of their day, throw their weight about in v.39. They warn Jesus to get these people to soften their tone and hold back from the dangerous things they were saying.

There are pressure groups and political correctnesses in every generation. In our time, the pressure is strong to change or at least keep quiet about Jesus' absolute claims about life, death, relationships and identity. And that pressure is growing. But let's remember the starting point - to proclaim the amazing and good things Jesus has done for us and amongst us. Starting there, we don't need to be ashamed of Him or His teaching, but proud of who He is *and* what He says.

There's a further challenge for disciples of Jesus that begins in this passage and unfolds in the chapters to come. Will we be consistent about proudly proclaiming Jesus? Or when things take an unexpected turn, will all the cheering suddenly stop?

v.37 says that it's when Jesus and those with Him 'came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives' that the praise pours forth. Like so many of the things we read in the gospels, something physical represents something spiritual here. Jesus and those who have chosen to follow Him have just come from Jericho. That's the lowest place on the face of the Earth.

And they have journeyed steadily up a long old uphill road. And here they are at the summit of the hill. The journey from rock bottom to following Jesus has been an ascending one - tiring, demanding, long - but on the up, more and

more things coming into view along the way. And here at the summit, like the top of any hill climb, the joyful feelings come out. Praise of God and of Jesus just trips off the tongue, because they've reached new heights with Him.

But what next? Well next, it's the road down. Down into Jerusalem. Down into what Jesus already told them was coming next. Down into controversy, conflict with the authorities, sharp debates with the the centre of culture, danger about being seen with Jesus. Down into imprisonment, torture and death. Down into experiences of suffering and shock that feel a million miles from the miracles they'd known.

And what happens to the crowd of disciples? They disappear. The loud praise dries up, the 'Jesus is amazing!' suddenly goes all quiet. Thank God Jesus is prepared to die for them anyway, even when they stop praising Him aloud when things get tough. Thank God Jesus was prepared to die for us even though we act just the same way.

When we're surprised that the road leads down from the summit to the valley, when we're floored by suffering and surprises, when things get scary - suddenly we lose our voices. Suddenly we're not up for making Jesus noticeable to others.

Where does it go, all that being thrilled about who Jesus is and what He has done? Have we forgotten the things that delighted us about coming to life in Him? Did they not happen after all - or do we just forget them really, really quickly when things turn dark?

There are some of us who have stopped making a noise about Jesus because the road has led down. Three things I'd say to you: 1) Pick up the praise again. With the rest of us, your can do it by looking back to the things Jesus has done for you that really are amazing and worth putting in front of other people.

2) Keeping the praise going in the dark makes a huge difference in drawing others to Jesus. I can think of someone whose starting point was pretty staunch atheist, and who still isn't a Christian, but is a whole lot more interested in the truth and power of Christian faith after seeing Heather going through what she has and noticing that Heather is still as passionate and trusting about Jesus as she always was.

3) Jesus doesn't stop owning your name even when you stopped shouting His. Be encouraged that this lot on the Mount of Olives did the same thing as

you, and yet Jesus went to die for them just as He did for you. He doesn't disown us. It's not Him who is fickle in the dark times - it's us. He saw through the darkest of times for fickle disciples like you and me.

*When in your life have you stopped talking enthusiastically about Jesus?
How did you/can you start again?*

In v.41, the lens zooms in from the noisy cheers of the temporarily bold disciples to Jesus Himself. And we find Him, in the middle of His coronation procession, crying. What's the Son of God greetin' about? Well, in a word - you. You who don't see what He's doing for you. You who won't take His scarred hand held out offering you peace.

His tears and words of lament in vv.41-44 are for the city of Jerusalem. Even as He heads into this city which was the centre of all things for the Jewish people - the centre of culture, the place to meet with God at the temple, the seat of political and religious authority - He knows that He is going to be rejected by it all. He's going to die for these people - to be the offering for their sin to end all offerings - but they're going to brush Him off.

This is something that makes Jesus Christ, God incarnate, *sad*. He cares about the people that are rejecting Him. In vv.43-44 He declares that destruction is coming to this city, and He makes it very clear in v.44 that the reason for it is because they didn't recognise that Jesus coming to them was *God* coming to them with a message they needed to act on - 'Repent and believe!'

The scene of violent destruction that Jesus describes happened in AD 70. The Romans razed the city of Jerusalem. The people were slaughtered, every brick was thrown down, and the temple was destroyed. I don't think anybody likes preaching that this kind of physical, violent destruction in human history has God's hand on it. His tears suggest that Jesus didn't enjoy it much either. Yet, destruction follows God's judgement.

Getting uncomfortable yet? Makes you squirm, doesn't it? I've been surprised by how much this comes up in Luke's gospel actually. We've had a few passages where Jesus talks about judgement and destruction coming to people. We've even skipped over one or two. We can't escape that part of the news that Jesus brings to the people of the Earth is 'God's judgement is coming, and that judgement is destruction.' We're foolish to sweep that under the rug when Jesus has said it so much.

But you've completely misunderstood God if you think He *wants* that to happen to you. Sin and rejection of God leads to judgement which leads to destruction. Which leads to tears from the One who bled and died to offer you another way. The way He offers is that your sin and rejection of God lead to judgement that *He* would take for you, destruction that *He* would physically experience on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says 'He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree...'

Jesus wept for this city who was going to experience judgement and destruction. He weeps for those who are living their lives destined for that too. Because people and whole cities and whole societies are headed for that, all because they haven't recognised peace when it's held out to them.

In v.42, Jesus says 'if only...'. How many times have we said that? And about what? 'If only... I had more money... If only I had more time... if only I hadn't been so stupid!... if only I could just get through this week...' Here's God's if only, and it's about you: 'If only you would see what would bring you peace!!!'

Peace - not a lovely sense of calm and wellbeing inside. But peace like the Bible means it. Peace between you and God. End of hostilities, becoming actually reconciled, talking-to-each-other family, you and God. Peace in the sense of wholeness - peace about material circumstances, relational situations, spiritual things. Peace that sets your life on an eternal footing.

And Jerusalem just can't see it! That Jesus offers peace from God and with God. How many people here in Inverness don't see it either! Nobody thinks they're heading for judgement and destruction. Nobody thinks they're God's enemies. They think He might be there and might give them a hand in life and a cloud to float on after death. Or they think He's not there, because He's not real.

There's the blindness. The un-recognition. Why would people reset their lives with this 'life in Jesus' thing if they don't know or believe that they are missing this peace from God and with God?

Jesus came to bring this message: (Try to listen carefully to this, because it's either the message you've never acted on, or the message that you need to pass on to others too.)

You need to change which road you're walking in life. You're walking through life separated from the God who made you. If you leave things as they are, you live as an enemy to God because you haven't wanted to know Him and

have rejected His company and His commands. Pretty soon the nights in and nights out and family outings and workplace politics and crazy chaos and quiet rest and weekends away and everything else will end - always before you're ready - and then it's judgement and destruction. That's what's at the end of this path.

But God *wants* to make peace with you. So much that His Son chose to die on a cross to take the judgement and destruction on Himself. He's swapping in for you, if you'll let Him. He's holding out a nail-pierced hand to you to say, 'Come with me, and have peace.' Jesus really, *really* wants you to have that. Not just peace, but faith in this life together with a family of other believers, and life beyond death. Life like it's supposed to be. No hole in the heart. No corrupt conscience. Just *life*. Forever.

God *wants* to make peace with you - so much that He cries over the ones who won't take it. The ones who are too stubborn, too busy, too comfortable, too uninterested and too blind to just stop and *take* the peace that comes from making Jesus King of their lives.

It's remarkable to me what was in Jesus' heart in this moment entering Jerusalem. As the crowds sang 'This is our King,' He wasn't swept up or puffed up, but His attention was on those who weren't singing that, and had no intention of doing so. He cried for them. As He headed into the city that would kill Him, His tears were *for them*. He undertook the most incredible act of love and sacrifice for people who He *knew* would say, 'Nah. I don't want it / believe it / need it.'

Don't tell me Jesus doesn't care about you. He cried for you. And He died for you. Are you going to respond to that? Are you going to make a noise about that?

What stands out for you about the way Jesus acts in this passage?