



VILLAGE  
CHURCH

Presbyterian (USA)

# There Is No Stopping This

SCRIPTURE:  
Luke 19:29-40

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April 2, 2023 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

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In Fredrik Backman's novel, "Us Against You," he describes the challenge and the hope that is parenting. He says it this way, "A mother is standing outside a house. She's packing her child's things into a car. How many times does that happen while they're growing up? How many toys do you pick up from the floor, how many stuffed animals do you have to form search parties for at bedtime, how many mittens do you give up on at pre-school? How many times do you think that if nature really does want people to reproduce, then perhaps evolution should have let all parents grow extra sets of arms so they can reach under all the wretched sofas and fridges? How many hours do we spend waiting in hallways for our kids? How many gray hairs do they give us? How many lifetimes do we devote to their single [lifetime]? What does it take to be a good parent? Not much. Just everything. Absolutely everything."<sup>1</sup>

More than that, we don't do these things because we know what we are doing, and we don't do these things because we know who our children will grow up to become. We do them because everything is at stake, and when you love, you live for the good. When you love, your choices today are shaped by a hope that tomorrow will be a better day. When you love, hope is hard to give up on. I think that's why Jesus rode that donkey.

It was a parade and like all parades, this one was exuberant. Yet unlike most parades, this one was unforgettable, as we still remember it today. There was an air of excitement—even expectation. All the gospel writers report the exaltation in the crowd. Luke says, "the disciples joyfully praised God."

This crowd was part parade and part march. Change was coming, at least that was the hope in the crowd. The oppression of the Roman occupation

was harsh and hated, and the people on the bottom—like people on the bottom in every age—prayed for change. They dreamed of a promised day when life would be a little easier, kindness would eat away hate, and fairness would rule. But like most ages, change is slow in coming. But on this parade day, change seemed possible. Freedom was riding into the city.

They experienced Jesus as a leader who could see them, I mean, really *see* ordinary people. The fulfillment of their hope was riding into Jerusalem. This was God's plan and the joy could not be contained. Songs of "Hosanna" filled the air.

But there was also tension in the air. Luke says some of the Pharisees in the crowd came to Jesus and pleaded with him, "Tell your disciples to quiet down." Perhaps they recognized this was more march than parade and feared that Roman soldiers would come to put a stop to this act of treason. Perhaps they feared that repression would follow. They feared a crack-down on this rebellious march. The religious leaders pleaded, "For goodness' sake! Get them to stop."

But this parade is God's parade and there is no power that can stop what is happening here. Jesus says, "I hear you, and there is a part of me that wants this to stop, too, but the reality is: there is no stopping this. If my followers were silent, the stones themselves would shout out." Jesus sounds a bit like he is living the love a parent lives for a child—you just do today whatever needs to be done because love like that just doesn't give up on hope.

There's something comforting in this curious promise that the stones would preach. This parade, like all parades, will quiet. The light of day will dissolve into evening and the crowds will go home. They will gather their cloaks and they will sweep up the confetti and the songs will fade. The donkey will be returned. But does the meaning of this day continue;

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<sup>1</sup> Fredrick Backman, *Us Against You* (2018) p. 4.

does it still live? I am grateful for this hopeful promise Jesus makes—that even if the disciples are silent or even silenced, the stones will preach.

William Klein, a retired pastor in Virginia, asks, “What would God have these stones say? These stones that have witnessed many a parade and many a march; these stones that have witnessed the flexing of powers. These stones ‘that could tell of the river of tears and blood spilled here and there as a result of any number of brutal campaigns.’”<sup>2</sup> These stones that have witnessed the brutality of humans. I think Rev. Klein is right. If God commanded the stones to talk, they would speak the truth of the world as it is. But I think they would also proclaim the way God’s love can redeem this world that is in desperate need of redemption. The same love that brought you and me and the stones of the ground into creation brings new creation in the love that leads Christ into the city. And there is no power that can stop that love.

On Monday, I felt sick. Not physically; not COVID. I learned of the shooting in a Presbyterian church. I immediately thought of my friends Rodger and Sophie. We were in ministry together in Jacksonville. Our kids are the same age. We don’t see each other very often anymore, but it’s the kind of friendship that when we do, we pick up where we left off. I love them. Sophie is the director of children’s ministry at a Presbyterian church in Nashville. When I heard the news, I felt weak and afraid. I spent a few anxious moments searching to learn that it was not her church. It was not even a church in our denomination. Because of that, I thought I wouldn’t know anyone there. But then I learned that Rev. Chad Scruggs, the pastor of Covenant Church, is the cousin of my friend Paul. Paul and I served in the Presbytery together in Florida. Rev. Scruggs sent his daughter, Hallie, to school last Monday. Yesterday they had her service. She was nine years old.

I don’t know what kind of pain one has to be facing, I don’t know what kind of brokenness there must be in one’s spirit to cause a person to shoot a nine-year-old little girl. But I’m not sure that’s the real question. Because people are going to feel pain and people’s spirits are going to be battered—that has always been true and that will always be true. The

human capacity to hurt the innocent is as old as Cain and Abel. The real question, it seems to me, is: What is wrong with the rest of us? We know today that this is going to happen again. We know today that nine-year-old girls will be shot again.

Our nation, and our highest courts, have declared that it is your and my right to own our own armories. There is precious little check on the commerce of weapons. And we know this: What we are doing today is not working. We are sacrificing the innocent to pay for this freedom to own the guns of our choosing. And we also know this: No nation of honor sacrifices her own children this way. To continue to witness this innocent bloodshed with a shrug of the shoulders is the American response, and it is legal, but it is not a moral response.

The circumstances were different. But the same sacrifice of the innocent was real the week that Jesus rode into Jerusalem and hoped that things could be different is the reason they sang, “Hosanna.” That was a long time ago and I wouldn’t blame you if you found it difficult this week to maintain hope. But don’t give up—because God has not given up.

John Lewis marched across the Pettis Bridge in Selma, Alabama. He later became a U.S. representative from Georgia and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and through it all, he lived as a conscience of the culture. John Lewis, in another violent and seemingly hopeless time, was going to Alabama to participate in the Freedom Rides of the mid-1960s. Lewis was in Nashville and he received calls from friends telling him not to go. The Kennedy White House dispatched John Seigenthaler to meet with Lewis to implore him not to go. “Don’t go,” they were told. “It’s a bloodbath. Be assured, someone will be killed if you [go to Alabama.]”

In Jon Meacham’s biography of Lewis, he describes it this way, “But they couldn’t stay away. Mob violence... must not stop [our] striving toward right.” Meacham interpreted this moment. “They weren’t thinking pragmatically or even rationally, for their thought was shaped not by the fears of the world they knew but by the hopes of the one they were seeking.”<sup>3</sup>

That is what Christian faith looks like. I think that is why Jesus rode that donkey. As people of faith, we

2 William M. Klein, *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, vol 2* “Luke 19:29-40, Theological Perspective” (2014) p. 178.

3 Jon Meacham, *His Truth is Marching On* (2020) p. 97-98.

never deny the reality of the world we know; but we never give up on the world we are seeking. We don't lose hope because God has not given up. And this parade day is a reminder that God will not stop.

Like Fredrick Backman asks: "How many times does a mother prepare after-school snacks? And how many times does a father find the liquid Tylenol at 2 a.m.? And how many times does a mother hang artwork on the fridge and how many times does the parent sort the laundry and drill the multiplication tables and remind the little one to make his bed and teach them to tell the truth, and to use words and not fists, and to share their toys? How many times?"

All in the hope that the children we have brought into the world will grow to become not just success-

ful, but good. All in the hope that the children we have brought into the world will have a chance to grow up to be "neither the destroyers nor the destroyed."<sup>4</sup> How many times? Parents never count. Because when you love like that, you sacrifice for your hope.

Jesus says God is a mother like that, who never counts how many times. Who knows no end to sacrifice. Who will not give up.

So, church: Do not lose hope. Do not give up. Do not stop because God will not. And even if we grow silent or are silenced, the stones themselves will preach. Our king has come and he rides in humility and he will make any sacrifice love requires and he will not stop.

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4 Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (1990) p. 299.