

“A Tearful Homecoming”

Luke 19:37-44

Series: New Year, New You

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Home. Four letters which form one of the sweetest words in the English language. Home is where you go to at the end of the day. It's the place where you might be welcomed with a child's squeals of delight, a wagging tail or a kiss. Home is where you wind down, slow down, calm down, chill out. Home is supposed to be your refuge from the rat race, your shelter from stress, your asylum from the insanity.

Supposed to be... Truth is you have no idea what you may find when you come home. It may not be squeals of delight but screams and demands. Instead of a wagging tail, it's a wagging finger. Instead of a kiss, it's a cold shoulder. Perhaps the place has been totally trashed. Ozzy Nelson handed your home over to Ozzy Osborne.

Edith, a mother of eight children in Darlington, Maryland, comes home one Saturday afternoon. As she enters the house, mom notices it is unusually quiet – frighteningly so. Turning the corner into the family room she spots her five youngest children huddled together, concentrating on something in the center. Not wanting to disturb their fun, she tip toes forward to see what holds them enthralled and freezes with horror. Smack dab in the middle of the circle are several baby skunks. The children must have found a nest and brought them inside. Alarmed, mom screams at the top of her voice, “Children, run, run, run!” Surprised by this sudden siren, each child grabs a skunk and runs. I think you can picture what happens next. Maybe you can even smell it. Imagine for a moment how you would feel if some incredible mess greeted you at the end of the day. How would you feel to find your home turned upside down?

The world, our home, belongs to God. David tells us so in Psalm 24.

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.
(Psalm 24:1)

He is the Landlord, we are the renters. He is the Creator, we are the caretakers. It's not a coincidence this Psalm, which begins by telling us about the Owner of the house, ends by directing us to open the doors and welcome Him home.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:9-11)

God is coming for a visit. And if there is one place on this planet which holds a special spot in His heart it is Jerusalem. The name of this Holy City appears over 800 times in the Bible. The Lord chose Jerusalem as the location for His House, the Temple of the

Lord. Jerusalem is the meeting place between God and His people. And the old prophets predict a day when the Lord will visit in person. Malachi proclaims,

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

Zechariah adds,

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. (Zechariah 9:9)

God is coming home. What will He find? Something worse than a nest of skunks.

When Jesus mounts the donkey on Palm Sunday and rides to the top of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, his followers know this is the fulfillment of Zechariah’s words. On cue they burst into shouts of praise. Quoting Psalm 118 they cry, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:26). Their words echoed the song of the angels at Jesus’ birth: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38). “Hosanna!” they cry. It means, “Save us!” Their salvation has finally come. What kind of salvation does He bring? Salvation from the oppressive Romans? Salvation from the corrupt priests and the ruling council? Salvation from poverty and slavery? Salvation from their sins, from death itself? All of the above. They want it all. They shout for Jesus to turn everything upside down, to topple all the corrupt and cruel tyrants. What they want is nothing short of revolution. Afraid such cries will bring a bloody crackdown, the Pharisees tell Jesus to silence His disciples.

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:39-40)

Stones crying out? What does He mean? Long ago there was an ad for a Victrola, one of the first record players. A dog named Nipper listens to the horn of the player. The slogan below it reads, “His Master’s Voice.” The sound quality is so great, Nipper thinks his master calls him. The stones of Jerusalem, the stones of Creation respond to their Master’s Voice. Like a faithful, four footed friend, like children racing to meet a parent, they cry out in welcome because their Maker has come home. So at the moment of triumph, with palms waving, multitudes singing and even the rocks ready to burst into song, what does Jesus do?

He weeps. He wails. He mourns. He loudly laments.

That’s one way to rain on their parade.

The disciples are baffled. Three years of amazing miracles, the fulfillment of countless prophecies, the swelling momentum of the multitudes marching with Him from the hills of Galilee to the gates of Jerusalem, expecting the final, long awaited victory of

God over all their enemies...and now this? Tears? Conquerors don't cry. On the eve of His victory why is the Savior sobbing? He can see what they can't – namely – the future.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:41-44)

During its long history, Jerusalem has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, captured and recaptured 44 times and utterly destroyed twice. From heaven, the Son of God has seen all this. He witnessed Jerusalem attacked by the Assyrian, sacked by the Babylonians, corrupted by the Greeks, conquered by the Romans. Every time it was a bloodbath. The crowds expect triumph. Jesus knows it will be torn down. The multitudes want an empire. Within forty years Jesus knows Jerusalem will be laid waste and empty. The Romans, like the Babylonians will encircle it and burn the Temple to the ground. Today, you can still dig in the dirt and find the layer of charred scorched earth they left.

The people cry for peace but Jesus knows they really want power and control. They are so blinded by power they can't see it is setting them on a collision course with destruction. They cry for justice but they mean "just us." They scream for "service" but it's really "serve us." They shout for peace but they will end up in pieces. The sacred stones, which long for the coming of their Master and Maker, will come tumbling down.

When Jesus cries over Jerusalem it isn't just moist eyes. It's a gut-wrenching, shoulder-shaking sorrow. It's the anguish of a parent whose child is out of control, the agony of a spouse who tried everything to save the marriage, that shattered feeling when you say goodbye as they close the casket. That's how Jesus grieves for Jerusalem.

My question to you this Palm Sunday and Passion Week is: What are you doing which makes God grieve? What in your life causes Jesus to weep? All through this series, from January 1 on, we've been learning how each of us can be a New You in the New Year. The overall idea is God saves each of us to be a Temple of Holy Spirit.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. I Corinthians 6:19-20

Your life is a home where God wants to live. Just as Jesus visited the Temple in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, so He wants to visit and live in your life through the Holy Spirit. After His tearful homecoming, Jesus had to do some housecleaning in the Temple.

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people

were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. Luke 19:45-48

Notice that Jesus doesn't just drive out the selfishness of the sellers. He also fills it with the holiness and truth of His teaching. Today, Jesus is visiting the temple of your life. He wants to drive out whatever is selfish, harmful or unhealthy in you and replace it with healthy, holy, wholesome practices. As we've seen there are pillars to your temple.

The Physical Pillar – “Love the Lord ...with all your strength” Deuteronomy 6:5

The Emotional Pillar – “Love the Lord ... with all you heart and soul” Deuteronomy 6:5

The Relational Pillar – “Love your neighbor as yourself” Leviticus 19:18

To summarize this series, let's look at each pillar on the insert in your bulletin. Just as Jesus removed unhealthy or unholy practices and added healthy and holy ones, I invite you to write in the first column an excuse or lie you'll give up and in the second column a practice or truth you'll pursue. Try to be specific. As we go through this I'll give you some examples and then time to jot down some words. This is yours to keep.

The Physical Pillar

We began by focusing on how to be a good steward of the body God gave you.

Exercise is essential for a healthy life. Yet there are a lot of lies we tell ourselves: I'll go to the gym tomorrow. All this sitting at my desk or in the car, all this lying on the couch isn't that bad. Smoking won't hurt me. Instead of excuses, here are some goals: sign up for a gym, go to the gym three times a week for 30 minutes, walk so many steps per day, ask an expert to help you create a balanced workout plan, get a workout buddy.

Nutrition: We are what we eat. Television tempts us with empty calories and then sells us fad diets. Many of us have an unhealthy relationship with food – we use it for comfort and control. For some it's an idol. Positive steps may be finding a balanced eating plan, saying no to sweets and salt, decreasing the size of portions, having more unhurried family meals, asking a partner to hold you accountable.

Rest: God designed us to take a break so we don't break. Some lies appear when we think our overstuffed schedules means we're important, when we think the world depends on us, when we feel guilty when we sit down. God wants you to take at least one day of rest from work – however you define that. Schedule it in your calendar. Ask someone to help you keep it. Make sure you go to bed at a reasonable hour. Maybe get rid of the TV in the bedroom.

The Emotional Pillar

Anxiety, Stress, Depression, and Anger are a part of life but they don't have to run our lives. One way to handle these feelings is to listen to your self-talk. Do you catch yourself saying, "I must..." or "They should..."? "I must never make a mistake. I must always be right. I must never look bad." "They should do what I say. They should appreciate my sacrifice. They should leave me alone." Challenging the self-talk is one way to reduce strong emotions. Some people are afraid to admit they have these feelings. They are "tense" but not anxious, "blue" not depressed, "upset" but not angry. Honestly admitting these feelings is the first step to dealing with them. On the positive side you might learn how to say "No" and not feel guilty, get some tasks off your plate, pray for people and situations which don't turn out the way you want. Agree not to go to bed angry by resolving conflicts. Respond to self-pity with gratitude for all God's blessings.

The Relational Pillar

Commitment, Compassion, Patience, Forgiveness, Communication, Gratitude. For this last part, I'd like you to think of a relationship which could use a little or even a lot of improvement. It is easy to conjure up examples of what the other person did wrong and strategies for what they should do to make it right. Without denying any of that, put all that aside for a minute and focus on your part. After all, that's the only part you can work on. Where did you fall short in one of these relationship skills? Did you allow yourself to get tangled in their mess? Did you say or do something which ignited the conflict or the distance? Do you keep going back for more pain? Now, what can you do on a positive note to begin to heal and restore the relationship? Write out how you think the situation looks from their perspective? Listen before you speak? Express gratitude for the good things they've done. Lift the person up in prayer to God. Forgive them remembering how much Jesus has forgiven you.

When you've finished jotting down your plan, pray and ask Jesus to help you see the next step in each goal or practice. Ask the Lord to help you turn good intentions into true transformation.

This is hard work. So why do it? Not just for self-improvement. Certainly not to impress people or to get them to like you. I want to be a new creation so Jesus will make His home in me, so the Holy Spirit will live in me. Instead of causing Jesus to grieve, mourn and lament, I want to fill Him with joy.

A great way to fill Him with joy is to live the way He taught us. Jesus began His powerful Sermon on the Mount with eight surprising principles we call "The Beatitudes." These aren't just pretty poetry. Each one is a powerful formula for living. But to unlock the blessing you have to try and test it, experience and experiment with it.

Our next series is called "The Experiment." Starting April 28, we'll investigate one of Jesus' Beatitudes each Sunday. During worship you'll receive five experiments about that Beatitude. Select one to perform during the week. You can do this with your Growth Group. We even encourage you to find a "Lab Partner" – a friend to try the experiment with you. Pray now for God to bring to you someone who doesn't go to

church. Come try these unconventional counter-intuitive experiments and discover the blessings Jesus has waiting for you. Invite Jesus to the home of your life.

We had some excitement here on Friday. A beautiful mallard duck laid a nest of eggs in the mulch of our parking lot. According to animal experts she may be there for a month. So we put up cones and signs around her. I'm asking all of you to watch out for her and keep a respectful distance from her. What an incredible honor that she chose our church to be the first home for precious babies. We should do everything we can to make her feel welcome. To make her feel at home.

What an honor it is to have the Dove of the Holy Spirit to make His home in you and me. There is no greater joy than for the God of the universe to call my life His Holy Temple, His house, His home.