

Text: Mark 11.1-11  
St Stephen's

April 4/5, 2009  
Palm Sunday

## The Story of Three Stories

It is just a jarring thing, to start this service with such strong praise, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!", palms in the air, celebrating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and then listen to the passion reading, and to shout at the end words that we would never want to say, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' How could that happen?

Perhaps this analogy will help: I think Holy Week is something like a **multiplex movie theater** with **three different movies** running at the same time. People came expecting to see one movie that was going to be wonderful. Then they found themselves watching another, that was sobering. And then they were shown a third, one they never expected at all. Today I want to jump from theater to theater with you and catch a glimpse of the stories. I think all three of them could be seen not only in Jerusalem, but can still be seen today, 2000 years later.

Here is the title of the first movie...

### "The Glory Story"

This is the 'wonderful' story, and the disciples were ready to help it happen. The disciples came to Jerusalem **expecting triumph**. They expected that Jesus would **claim the throne this week**. They were in on a 'glory story', and they had good reason to think so...

You remember as he moved towards that city in the months before, his **popularity had surged**. And now, on his entrance into the holy city, and **the day belonged to Jesus**.

*The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* Luke 19:37-38

**Hosannas** ring out and fill the city. **Palm branches** of victory are lifted up. **People take off their coats** and lay them in front of Jesus as he rides in. The **crowd** breaks into choruses of praise and festal shouts. The **disciples** are ecstatic. For years Jesus had dodged their praises, but not now, not today. He even said that if he had ordered his disciples to tone it down, even the stones would have cried out.

It **could hardly have gone better** on that Palm Sunday. But their 'Glory Story' was about to be flipped.

What do I mean by **the 'glory story'**? I use that phrase to describe the **defining story** of your days, **the major movie script of your life**. It is your fantasy about your life.

- Guess who the **main character** is in your movie? Well, it's **you**. And in your 'glory story', you are **the hero**. In your movie **you do well**. You fight against incredible odds, and in the end you prevail. It's a '**Rocky**' story. It's a movie like '**Rudy**', when he is carried off the field by his Notre Dame teammates.
- Guess who the **supporting cast** is in your movie? In the religious version of the glory story, the supporting cast is **God**. To be honest, you think you will need a little help from time to time from him.

So you are the **hero** and God is your **supporting cast**; that's the 'glory story'. Do you know that movie? It plays out in your secret **fantasies** and daydreams. It is the underlying theme of many of our **life decisions** and our **career aspirations**. It shows up in the **worst** things we do – **and** (here is its deceptive power) in the very **best** things we do.

The **reformers** believed that this glory story is the **default position** of every human heart, the **hidden script** for every life. '**A theology of glory**', they called it. Don't you know this movie? It showed up all the time as Jesus worked with his disciples.

Do you remember when **Jesus first talked about the suffering** he would face in Jerusalem and Peter took him aside and rebuked Jesus...  
*"This will never happen to you..."* Matt 16.22

That's **the glory story**, spilling out of Peter; he has no room for suffering and setbacks and certainly not for the cross. He **reprimands** Jesus for his **'negative thinking'**.

Do you remember what **the disciples** were **talking** about as they got closer to Jerusalem?

*"they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.""*

Mark 10:37

That's the **glory story again**. That's their plan. They would sweep the Romans out of Jerusalem, and make Jesus King. They would be his **cabinet**, and John and James, the Zebedee boys, were jockeying for the **key positions** of authority and honor. They would be the **heroes**. Jesus would help them get it done. It's 'The Glory Story', and it's playing at almost every theater! It runs deep in every heart.

Jesus had his eyes on a **second movie**:

## **The Sin Story**

This is not a popular movie, not then, not now.

Have you noticed that we **don't use the language of sin** very much any more? That is one of the reasons why we have offered our Lenten series on the Seven Deadly Sins and the corresponding Beatitudes; we have wanted to restore the language of sin among us.

In America we **don't 'commit sins'** anymore; we **make 'mistakes'**. Just think of all the cabinet nominees in our current administration who made tax 'mistakes'. 'Mistake' is a popular word. **A sin** is something intentional and significant and offensive. **A mistake** is something unintentional, something that can be overlooked and set aside. The shift is subtle but significant, and it is **driven by theology**. The

theology is that we think highly of ourselves. Sin language **doesn't fit** to well with the **glory story**.

So, we live in a culture where there is no sin, no wrong, no absolutes. It is the land of situation ethics, the land of relative values, the land of choice.

**Os Guinness** commented on this: *"Modern culture is... a grand license to eat whatever we feel like eating, sleep with whomever is willing, rebel against whatever frustrates us, lash back at whatever has hurt us, and cross whatever legal and ethical lines are beyond detection."*

In our culture today, we've lost our **language** for sin, our **fear** of sin, and with it our **wisdom** about its pathways in our lives. This is the impact of the glory story.

Something like this is what was happening **to the disciples on the way into Jerusalem**.

They hadn't lost the language of sin yet, but **the sin they saw** – the sin they were focused on - was **not their own**, but that of **others**. And they were ready to toss 'em out. They would be the **heroes**. Jesus was their supporting cast. It was going to be a great movie!!

But the disciples never saw that **their 'glory story' masked** something that was killing them – their **pride**. They had **no idea their 'Sin Story' ran that deep**. No idea.

On **Maundy Thursday**, when Jesus warned Peter that Satan was going to sift him, **Peter blew him off**. When he told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed,

*"he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."  
And they all said the same."*

Mark 14:31

They all thought they could pull it off. "Look, Jesus, you picked the right people. We'll get it done. And **quit this negative talk** about suffering and dying. That's not in the script!" They had **no idea their 'Sin Story' would chart a different path.** No idea.

But the Holy Week '**Sin Story**' was about to **erupt into full public view.** In the **opening scene** there is this **crowd** that could shout "Hosanna" on Sunday and "Crucify Him" on Friday. A lot of the same people. Just **five days later.**

And then it's the **disciples** who **vow** they would **not fail.** **And they fail.** Every one of them bailed on Jesus. No exceptions. The best of them. All of them. They had **no idea their 'Sin Story' ran that deep.** No idea.

It is worth thinking about **which of these two movies is the truer story** of your life. Is it the 'Glory Story', where you are the hero, and you just need a little help from time to time? Or is it the 'Sin Story', where you find to your horror that you have a problem that goes deeper than you ever dared imagine?

**Be careful before you say you would act differently than those disciples.** Your own 'Sin Story' speaks otherwise. And that story was playing in full public view on Holy Week.

The third movie is known as "the Cross Story".

### **The Cross Story**

Actually, Jesus had been trying to **get people to watch** this movie for some time, but there were **no takers.** In the last weeks of Jesus' life, though, it was getting unavoidable. Luke tells us...

*When the days drew near for him to be received up, **he set his face to go to Jerusalem.***

Luke 9.51

This was some weeks before Passover, and Jesus was **locked in. Intense.** The **severity** of Jesus **unnerved** his disciples. It is easy to picture him, about 20 yards ahead of a few hundred people.

*Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid...*

Mark 10:32

What marked these final weeks of Jesus' life was this **determination** to face into the cross. In Jerusalem...

The **conflict** would build... and he **wouldn't back off.**

The **fatal plots** to betray him were hatched, and he seemed like he was **expecting it.**

They dragged him before the religious **court** – and then off to the civil court – and he **wouldn't defend himself.**

There was the possibility of a **Passover pardon**, but he stood, **silent.**

In the end, the mob would roar, "**Crucify Him!**"

His confidence and resolve **unnerved** everyone around him. The moment he lived for had arrived. **He lived to die.**

*When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.*

Luke 23:26, 27, 33

Through the days of Holy Week, on his way to the cross, Jesus knew that **no superficial help** would suffice for these disciples of his. That our condition was beyond the help of some optimistic thinking, occasional assistance from God, and the friendly encouragement of friends. The problem was far deeper, and he never lost sight of it.

He knew that our condition is more like that of **the addict**, blind to his own addiction – and what are we **addicted** to? Well, at the bottom, **to ourselves.** To the 'glory story' that features us.

And he knew that it would take an **intervention**, that there is **no cheap help** for this condition, that sin is desperately difficult to fix, even for God, that it would take massive **forgiveness**, the **death** of the **old life**, and something entirely new birthed inside us. So on he went. To his cross.

Martin **Luther** said "*the cross is **the safest of all places**. Blessed is the man who understands this.*" It hardly seemed a safe place in that Holy Week; everyone fled from the cross. But Luther has been proved right.

The cross is Christ's **intervention and judgment upon** the glory story. It liberates and frees us and gives us eyes to see what we were blind to see. The cross is His **forgiveness** and **freedom** from the sin story, from every part of the sin story – every heartbreaking part.

You and I are **invited into that Cross Story**. Come as you are (we like to say), but **be ready to let go** –

**Let go of the glory story** and your desire to be the hero.

**And let go of the sin story** – it doesn't have to be your future.

And **what do we find as we come?** That we have been welcomed into the **truest and best story** of all, the major drama playing across the whole cosmos – the story where **Jesus proves to be the real hero** - the story where we find **freedom** from the terrible dungeon of ourselves, where we find **forgiveness** from the faults and failures that run so deep. And we find that we have been **welcomed** into the supporting cast - (would that be OK with you, to let him be the hero, and to have just a small part in the great drama, the true story?) - and where we find that little as we are, and little though our part may be, it is a **very important part**, and that we are people **whom the hero loves very, very much**.

Come and walk with Jesus through this week, and draw near to his cross, and you will find this is so...