

Spiritual Momentum

*And some of the Pharisees called to Jesus from the crowd, 'Teacher, restrain Your disciples.'
But He answered and said to them, 'I tell you that if they kept silent, the very stones in the road
would burst out cheering!''*

Luke 19:39-40

A Palm Sunday Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

It's wonderful when we have momentum. There's nothing quite like it - everything clicks, we get in a zone and the momentum we have for whatever it is that we're doing propels us forward in such a way that we almost lose track of time, and the task at hand becomes effortless. During times like these there is very little that can discourage us or weaken our resolve. Of course there are plenty of times when we *lack* momentum, when even the smallest task ends up being incredibly difficult to do, but even then we are not deterred because we know we can get it back again.

Today's sermon addresses the idea of *spiritual* momentum as it relates to our re-birth and regeneration. Spiritual momentum has many similar attributes to the mental and physical "momentum" we experience when we're focused on a task or activity we enjoy, but the type of momentum we'll be discussing today is even stronger and more satisfying and consistent because the Lord is the hidden force behind it.

So let's turn to our text to see what we can learn.

By riding into Jerusalem as King, the Lord set in motion a series of events that became unstoppable. The Pharisees were deeply worried. It was becoming embarrassingly obvious that they were losing control and, almost laughably, tried to shut down the festivities - "*Teacher, restrain Your disciples*" - stop them from being happy, from cheering, from celebrating, from joining together to praise You for all the mighty works they've seen. And what was the Lord's response? It's possible His answer came with a smile; "*if they [His followers] kept silent, the very stones in the road would burst out cheering!*" In other words, it was too late. The momentum for truth, for goodness, for love, had grown so strong, so massive, so unstoppable, no human being could stand in its way.

The Lord's reference to the "stones crying out" is a beautiful reminder of *Isaiah 55:12* which says that nature itself will celebrate the Lord's salvation (alongside humanity):

"For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing...and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands..."

The events of Palm Sunday leading to the last week of the Lord's life on earth mark a dramatic shift in the gospel narrative. Even after the Lord rode into Jerusalem as King, it seems, on the surface, as if He continued doing what He'd always been doing during His public ministry - teaching in the synagogues, healing the sick, and making new disciples but today's scripture text adds a new layer, a peak behind the curtain if you will, of something else that was going on!

The work of the Lord's life on earth was creating an unstoppable kind of momentum, a new kind of order, power and strength, and one that was making the world practically burst at the seams!

So what was going on?

We tend to think of Old Testament teachings and New Testament teachings as stand-alone "sayings," as not necessarily being connected to each other or even *needing* each other. There's some truth to this in that the Two Great Commandments or the Golden Rule do hold a power and relevance all on their own, but it's equally true that they gain even *more* power and momentum in our lives when they are connected to other truths, other teachings, that broaden our perspective on what it means to love the Lord and each other. This brings us to the striking lesson you heard read this morning which said, *"our faith becomes more spiritual (and less earthy) based on the **quantity** of truths we have and how well they fit together..."* (TCR 352).

That's a challenging statement, isn't it - the strength of our faith is based on the "quantity" of truths we possess. Shouldn't it say the strength of our faith is based on the *quality* of truths we have - isn't *quality* more important than *quantity*?! Well, when it comes to the truths of the Lord's Word, every truth is of the highest *quality*, so that's not the issue. The question is, why do we need lots and lots of truths to make our faith strong? Won't a few key ideas or teachings suffice?

Speaking of volume, people will sometimes point out that the Old and New Testament contain many individual books (66 all told), thus many words, which essentially teach the same thing, that we are to love the Lord and our neighbor by keeping the Ten Commandments. The same could be said about the Heavenly Doctrines, why do we need thirty volumes of New Church teachings to tell us the same thing? Isn't that redundant?

The answer can be boiled down to one word: *evil*. The presence of evil in and around us makes it very difficult for us to hear the Lord, and that's a huge problem - a salvation problem, actually. The presence of evil in and around us makes it so that we don't take spiritual matters seriously. This means that evil, if we don't do anything to confront it, will turn us into terrible listeners. It will make us think we know better than others, including the Lord. It will pit us against each other and create our own reality, a reality that is shockingly self-absorbed and uninterested in helping other people. This is why we so desperately need the Lord's truths, and many of them. They give us the *spiritual momentum* we need to push through the confusion and contradictions and hardship and inertia of life in this world.

The lesson we read this morning revealed a remarkable sequence, a chain-reaction or domino effect if you will, of what happens when we equip ourselves with "many" truths that, taken together, gain strength "*like strands in a cable...*" It said...

- many truths will make our faith less and less "*sense oriented and earthy...*"
- it will open up the "*higher regions of our mind...*"
- it will enable us to see confirming evidence of the Lord in nature
- the clarity we will get by following the Lord in His Word will become "*more perceivable and obvious...*"
- we will find it much *easier* to reach out to others "*with acts of goodwill...*"
- we will find it *easier* to separate from the evil in and around us and the "*enticements of the eye and the cravings of the flesh*" will become less appealing
- and above all, it will give us more power, more momentum, against evils and falsities (see TCR 352).

This acquisition of "many truths" is not some sort of intellectual or academic exercise. It's very much a part of our re-birth and regeneration. It's a desire that the Lord's many truths, which are *all* expressions of His love and mercy, grow in us, and gain momentum in us, until His work of salvation *in us* becomes unstoppable and the evil spirits represented by the Pharisees can do nothing about it. This hidden process of redemption parallels the Lord's own glorification - by the time He rode into Jerusalem as King, the inner work of uniting His Divine to His Human was almost complete. Nothing could stop the celebration from happening that day.

Now, as much as we might like to think we can "handle" any and all truths the Lord might point out to us in His Word (take it on the chin, as it were), the reality is sometimes quite different. One very helpful teaching in our church says we can only

accept specific truths from the Word **if an affection for the general idea already exists**. This is what the teaching says:

"General concepts [from the Word] have to be present in our mind first, before particular [ideas]. If the broad concepts [from the Word] are not welcomed first, the particulars cannot possibly gain entrance. In fact they trigger boredom (another translation says the particulars "excite disgust...") because the broad concepts have not been received with affection first (AC 5454).

What is this saying? Take some practical examples first. If someone has a passion for cooking or gardening or woodworking or mountain-climbing they will have no problem, no hesitation, diving into the details, the specifics, that help them perfect their "craft," their skills. Our spiritual lives are a little different in that we may be "passionate" about being a good person, about living lives of integrity, but as the Lord reminded His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak..." (Matthew 26:41).*

Take by way of example the general teaching that the Lord is our Savior. This is what the name, *Jesus* means - "Jehovah saves." We all have an affection for the general concept, the general idea that the Lord is our Savior. So far so good, but it gets a little trickier when we encounter specific teachings, "particulars" in the Word, that challenge us to repent (turn away from) things we may not be ready to let go of like an angry feeling, or our pride, or a grudge, or a feeling of ingratitude. Suddenly we aren't so interested in the details, the particulars, because we discover that the Lord our Savior is very serious about healing us now, in the moment, not sometime down the road.

The same principle applies to all other general teachings in the Word. We may have no issue with the grand themes of the Word - faith, charity, repentance, freedom, providence, marriage, the afterlife but the "many" particular truths which are given in support of these general themes, and which broaden our perspective, won't gain momentum in us **until we are ready for them**. Again, it's not that we don't have an affection for these general truths. It's just that the timing, the sequence, of when we are actually ready to change is different for everyone.

Thankfully the Lord is in charge. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And in terms of sequence, the Lord is acquainted with our grief, our struggles. He is leading us every day "quickenings" and "strengthening" our resolve whenever we turn to Him

for help (see HH 533). We gain spiritual momentum from the Lord when we go to His Word and build up our knowledge base, when we seek out *new truths* to tackle new and difficult challenges. This makes us stronger and happier people. We become less fearful, less intimidated by setback and disappointment.

All of the many truths of the Word, all of these spiritual treasures, are given to broaden our perspective on what it means to truly love the Lord and each other.

All of this is possible because of what the Lord did for us when He came into the world. When He rode into Jerusalem as King on what has come to be known as Palm Sunday, He changed the spiritual trajectory of the human race. The momentum for truth, for goodness, for love, had grown so strong, so massive, so unstoppable, no human being could stand in its way. That is why there was a celebration and this is why we join that celebration today.

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 19:28-48, True Christianity 352, Heaven & Hell 533