

“Borrowed”

A sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 3/28/2021

I tell you the story of someone from my own family. This woman I am talking about didn't have much growing up. She was born poor. She didn't know where her next meal would come from often times. She worried about everyone in her family more than herself. Even as a very young child she would make sure everyone else ate before she did, and she continues that practice today. She grew up well before she should have had to. When she got her first job, she gave nearly all her money to her family so they could survive, leaving very little for herself. She did not have a savings because every penny was consumed to support the ones she loved the most in this world. She thought of everyone but her herself. The only splurging she did was to buy a special shampoo she had once seen on a TV ad; something she had always only imagined trying on her hair, so she could really feel clean. That was her only hint of selfishness, if you could possibly call it that. She eventually met someone and fell in love. He was nearly as poor as she was. Her parents thought she could do better, but she was in love, and as we all know from experience-- love is completely oblivious to such things—i.e., material things. So her heart was all set to marry, with no money, no prospects of marrying into any money, but she made do with what she had. Her family and community pulled all they could together to provide a humble meal for the occasion, and when it came to her dress, she couldn't afford one. So, her family arranged for her to borrow one. Yes, that's right. She borrowed a wedding dress that was not her own from someone she wasn't exactly close to. Some small adjustments had to be made, but it worked, and she walked down the aisle with a face whose smile put the sun to shame. She was so happy. For her, the clothes were unimportant. The fact that she would have to give the dress back later that night was irrelevant to the moment as she walked graciously, like a princess, through the old church. This is the life of the poor. She couldn't think of legacy, having a dress made that she could hand down to her own daughter one day. No, for the poor all she was the moment. She was on cloud 9 floating between the pews, poor, but happy, gracious in spirit, generous in heart—and as humble as can be. This was her moment, borrowed or not. For the poor rarely are owners, instead the poor are used to a life as mere borrowers.

But this woman had more in common with the “spiritual king” she adored: Jesus of Nazareth, probably than she realized at the time. Jesus said, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20), so of course, he wouldn't own anything to ride into Jerusalem on. The king needed his steed, right? Jesus was poor surrounded by the poor. When he entered Jerusalem, he did not have material possessions. It says in Scripture that the crowd had gathered not because he had wealth, but because he had done something miraculous the day before. He had raised Lazarus from the grave. Jesus had brought life to death. He did not have anything from this world, what he brought was faith in something greater within all of us, the ability to live when surrounded by death. So, they laid their palms and even their own clothes on the street as Jesus entered Jerusalem that Sunday, celebrating his arrival as their savior—the man who conquered death.

The people that received him understood the nature of “borrowed”. Many of them used borrowed tools when they worked the fields. Many of them lived in borrowed rooms at someone’s house. Many of them even laid down their borrowed clothes on the street to welcome their new king. They understood borrowed. “Borrowed” gives us the idea of “temporary.” Jesus talked like this life was temporary so don’t worry so much. That we are all only here for a short time. Others, though, build up treasures, thinking this life is all they have. Jesus talked about a continuation after this world. That our consciousness or our spirit will continue on forever, so don’t worry so much about acquiring “things” here. Instead, focus on what? Focus on healing each other’s pain. Raise each other from death to life, lift each other up! That is what love is, right? So on this Palm Sunday, lay down your treasures, like the people who laid down the work of their hands (the palms from the fields they had just been working), and the clothes on their backs, and let us welcome this kingdom of God together. Let us close our eyes, and mentally lay down ourselves on that street. Let us become the kingdom Jesus preached so much about. For, as he said, the kingdom of God is within us all—it is here!

Shalom