

Undercover God
Luke 19:28-44

Friends, do you know who you work for? Would you recognize your boss, or the owner or CEO of your company if they showed up at work one day? And if they did, how would you conduct yourself?

Well I'm certain that most of us would want to be on our best behavior as employees, we'd want to be sure that we were doing our jobs to the best of our abilities, and we'd probably go the extra mile so that we would leave a good impression with the boss – and hope that would translate into some sort of eventual reward or promotion for us.

But what if your boss showed up at work and you didn't recognize him! What if they showed up in disguise?

That's the whole concept behind the reality TV show "Undercover Boss."

Owners and CEOs disguise themselves and work "undercover" as a new employee, to discover firsthand what it's like to work for their company.

The main purpose of this undercover operation is to let management walk a mile in the shoes of the worker - so that they can discover what might be hindering productivity and find new ways to improve employee morale.

However, along the way they also discover which employees are actually doing their jobs properly and which ones only perform when the boss is around.

And at the end of the show, when the boss has gone back to being the boss, all the workers whom they have spent time with are summoned to come to corporate headquarters – and the only explanation that is given to them is that the boss wants to see them.

Naturally they are very nervous, because they don't know what is going on – most of them are worried that they are in

some sort of trouble... some however think that this is going to be their big break – that they are getting some kind of promotion...

And when they meet the boss, their faces tell the whole story – if they have done their job well in spite of whatever challenges they have – their faces register a delighted surprise and incredulity that this person, who they thought was just an employee, was in fact their boss...

But if they are guilty of not doing a good job, if they've cut corners and have slacked off – then the look on their face is one of dismay, shock, regret... as they discover they've revealed their true nature as an employee in front of the boss, and they know there will be consequences.

If only they had known; if they could have recognized their boss undercover – then they would have done a much better job in front of them.

But that's the whole point isn't it – when you know that the boss is around you behave, you act appropriately and so on – the real test of character is how you act when the boss isn't around, or when you don't know that they're around.

And we're reminded of that in what Jesus says in the scripture passage that we read this morning, as we see Him approaching Jerusalem.

“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.” (vs. 42) and then Jesus goes on to describe the disaster that will befall Jerusalem and its residents because, as He says, *“you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you”* (vs. 44)

If only Jerusalem had recognized that Jesus was indeed Yahweh, their God, that He was the Word of Yahweh made flesh and he was coming to them to bring them peace...

If only they could have known this they would have acted differently and avoided the disaster and destruction that eventually would come upon them.

But they did not because Yahweh had come to them “undercover” as it were.

The Word of Yahweh became flesh in humble circumstances... conceived out of wedlock, born in a stable, his birth was announced by shepherds...

He grew up in the backwater regions of Nazareth and Galilee, and He seemed more concerned with correcting how the Law of Moses had been twisted, than with using His powers to rally the people against Rome.

So aside from the fact that He could do some miracles... most people did not recognize Jesus as God undercover, coming to reveal to His people what truly oppressed them and to release them from it...

So, Jerusalem continued to chafe under the rule of Rome, its people always seething with discontent ready to riot, ripe for insurgency, and there was a constant stream of revolutionaries who would rally the people to revolt, and lead another attempt to overthrow the Romans.

And this is a bit ironic - because the name Jerusalem means the City of Shalom – the city of Peace, of wholeness...

I’m sure that irony was not lost on the Romans either as they constantly had to put down rebellions and execute revolutionaries.

Eventually their patience wore out and in 70 AD Emperor Titus led his armies against Jerusalem - laid siege to it, destroyed it, and executed its inhabitants.

So Jesus’ words are fulfilled ⁴³ *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.* ⁴⁴ *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."

So Palm Sunday might be better named Ironic Sunday, because the people were celebrating Jesus's arrival to Jerusalem for the Passover Celebration as a King – and He was a King – but ironically not a King who was coming to bring them political peace or national deliverance.

Ironically the peace that Jesus came to bring was accomplished through the religious leaders trying to keep the political peace.

They were afraid of the Roman retribution if the crowds decided to carry this Messiah thing with Jesus too far...

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (vs. 38)

"Teacher rebuke your disciples..." (vs. 39)

"If only you knew what could bring you peace... shalom... wholeness" (vs. 42)

You see friends the truth is that even if Jesus had overthrown the Romans, political independence would not make God's people whole.

Yes, it might bring about a feeling of tranquility in their hearts that they were free to pursue their own destiny once more, but it would not make them whole.

The pride and fear which caused their leaders to twist the Law of Moses and make it oppressive would still be there...

The greed which caused some to collaborate with the Romans as Tax collectors, and others to do business in the temple courts would still be there...

The unbelief which prevented Jesus from doing miracles in his hometown would still be there...

The Sin which caused this pride, fear, greed, unbelief and so much more – would still be there...

Friends, the irony of Jesus' arrival to the City of Shalom - of wholeness, to bring wholeness, and to celebrate Passover – how God freed his people from slavery in the past... is that it's people can't recognize their own need for wholeness, nor do they recognize their real oppressor, who truly holds them captive and that they are slaves to Sin.

Now bible scholars tell us that the language and the wording that Luke uses to describe how Jerusalem can't recognize God's visitation to them - implies that Satan is the one who has hidden it from their eyes and prevented them from recognizing Jesus.

The Apostle Paul describes it a bit more bluntly in 2 Cor 4:4
"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

So, in the end Jerusalem's brokenness and spiritual captivity will lead to their destruction – and they didn't even see it coming, they *"did not recognize the time of God's coming to them."*

And friends, this is the point that the Holy Spirit wants to impress upon us this morning and warn us about as we start our Easter celebrations.

The Holy Spirit wants to help us recognize this Easter is the time of God's visitation for us.

So in focusing on and celebrating Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, as we read about how Jesus rides in on a donkey, about how people are shouting *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* the Spirit wants to open our eyes so that we can recognize "the time" of God's visitation in our own lives.

That means we need recognize what time it is – yes it is Eastertime but we need to recognize that Easter is not something chronological – in spite of the fact that we’ve scheduled our celebration of it to take place on the first Sunday following the first Full Moon of Spring.

Eastertime is not chronological time, it is Kairos time – a fullness of time, a completeness of time, a context of time that defines any further chronological time.

So Easter is not just another holiday on the calendar, another long-weekend, another opportunity to get together with family and friends, and once it is over everything goes back to normal...

Friends - Easter defines the time in which we live.

Easter is when Jesus offered His life to pay for all of Israel’s prior covenant unfaithfulness and at the same time - because Covenants are always paid out in blood and started in blood – at the same time creating a new covenant between God and

humanity which anyone can participate in, simply by trusting in Jesus’ sacrifice and covenant faithfulness...

Easter is the new reality we live in.

Friends – we don’t want to miss out on living in this covenant of freedom and grace and forgiveness in our day to day lives because we don’t recognize it!

So today is time to open our eyes and recognize it – the Spirit wants to work among us to help that happen.

And maybe this is the first time that your eyes have been opened to see what Easter is all about – and you are seeing all the forgiveness and grace and mercy that can be yours by believing and trusting in Jesus – and that is awesome – come and tell me about that!

Or maybe your recognition needs to go deeper.

Yes you know Easter is about Jesus' dying for our sins, and you've asked Jesus to forgive your sins that one time and you're glad you've got things settled up with Him.

But friends we need to recognize that Jesus came to do more than just "forgive our sins" – He came to bring us peace – wholeness... while your sins may be forgiven you might still be walking around broken and wounded – emotionally, spiritually, even physically – it's all connected.

We might not recognize that we can keep Jesus at arm's length and prevent him from giving us that peace by "academically" admitting that you're a sinner – after all, no one is perfect, I'm sure I've told a lie here or there, I've been angry with someone at some point etc... yes I'm a sinner who needs Jesus.

Because we fail to recognize the emotional, physical and psychological ways in which our sin brings brokenness in our lives – our unhealthy coping mechanisms, our character flaws,

our bad habits, those things which set us off because they've touched old wounds.

The Holy Spirit wants us to recognize that these are the areas where God wants to come and visit in our lives and bring peace –wholeness.

And friends, we need to recognize that like the people of Jesus' day – we can find ourselves in a place where much of what we want and expect, and ask God to do for us externally is wrong... because we do not recognize our need for peace and wholeness - internally.

We will shout: Hosanna – Lord save us... give me a better paying job, change my spouse so they are easier to live with, make my kids more respectful, make that temptation go away, help other people to see things like I do...

But in reality the Lord needs to save us from ourselves.

Friends, this morning the Spirit wants to help us recognize that our external circumstances, no matter how unpleasant, do not hold us captive to the enemy.

Instead it is our sin and brokenness “inside” which we need to be freed from.

We need the healing power of the Holy Spirit to come and visit us - minister to us and bring us wholeness. And that is possible friends because of what Jesus did at Easter.

Then, we are free to respond to the world around us in peace, to its hate with Christ’s love, to its indifference with Christ’s compassion, to its lies with Christ’s truth.

This is what Easter is really about.

So friends – this is not just another Easter that has come up on the calendar and so it is time once again to wave some Palm Branches, sing the Old Rugged Cross on Good Friday, hunt for Easter Eggs and Hot Cross Buns on Easter Sunday...

Friends, this Easter the Spirit wants to open our eyes and our hearts, so that we recognize - this is a Kairos moment, a time when God will to come and visit you, to bring you peace and wholeness.

So – we need to be watching, listening, paying attention in our day to day lives over the next month, so that we can recognize when Spirit of God is visiting us with the love and truth and healing of Jesus Christ..

And we can welcome and co-operate with that visit so that Jesus becomes more than just our savior - He also becomes our King! Amen.