

## OUR PART IN GOD'S PARADE

**Luke 19:28–48**

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Beginning in Luke 19:28 and reading to the end of the chapter.

“After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” tell him, “The Lord needs it.”’ Those who were sent ahead went and found it, just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They replied, ‘The Lord needs it.’ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, 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!’ 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.’ 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.’ Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, “‘My house

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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 19:28–48, NIV).

“Our Part in God’s Parade”—the Triumphal Entry. That’s what we call it—“the Triumphal Entry.” I’m not sure that that’s what they called it when it first happened.

I had an experience this week of having something given a name that was not its true name. I didn’t recognize what was being talked about. I was talking with our guide in Jordan, on Thursday, as we were on the way to Petra, and he was mentioning that he had seen a Jordanian news clip on television the night before, with news on America. That on New Year’s day, we had had a flower parade in one of our cities. I tried to think, as he was talking, “Where is it in the United States that we have a flower parade?” I drew an absolute blank. Until finally, I realized, of course! He was talking about the Rose Parade. But in the translation over there, it had become the “Flower Parade.”

If you had asked a contemporary of Jesus about the Triumphal Entry, He would be liable to scratch His head and say, “What triumph? What entry?”

One of the interesting things that happens when you compare Gospel accounts with Gospel accounts is that sometimes the Gospel writers are not as concerned with chronology as we are. Luke is one of those who are not concerned, at times, to note the passing of a day. Mark alone, in the Gospels, gives us a little detail that, when Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Triumphal Entry Day) and went to the temple, He did not cleanse it on that day. When He arrived at the temple, He simply looked around, Mark says, and then He went back to Bethany. It was not until the next day that He came back. Had He cleansed the temple on the same day that

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He entered, He would have set off a riot that would have been uncontrollable. That riot would have fueled all the speculation that some had that He was a political revolutionary and political Messiah.

So, for many, this Triumphal Entry, this parade of Jesus, was not indeed an entry in triumph. It was a parade of missed opportunity. You see, Jerusalem in Jesus' day had a population of around eighty thousand people. But during a high holy time such as Passover, over a hundred and twenty thousand additional pilgrims would come into town, swelling the population of the city to over two hundred thousand. Many of those hundred and twenty thousand coming into the city were from Galilee, where Jesus was popular. They were with Him, and they would have taken steps—politically—with Him and would have incited a revolution against the government. But He chose to come in and simply make the statement that He was the king by riding on an unbroken colt, to look around at the temple, and to come back and cleanse it the next day.

It's a wonderful thing for a deserving person to be recognized. There were so few moments in the Lord's life in which He accepted recognition and, if you use our language, this is the only time He ever received a standing ovation during His life. It's the standing ovation of the Passover Triumphal Entry.

It's wonderful to be recognized for doing something right and well. Sometimes, we don't do it enough to one another. I was thinking of a missionary I got a card from before I left for the Holy Land at the end of the Christmas season. I had sent her a card. She's a retired missionary, and sort of on my list of people I want to say to, "We appreciate you." She's been retired now for some years. I got a beautiful little note back, thanking me for my card and then saying, "Of all the churches that supported me over the forty years I was a missionary, yours is the only church that still sends me a card." You can find a little wistfulness and regret in that. Like, "I really tried

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hard out there and nobody remembers today.” They’re spiritually strong enough to handle that.

But there was that note of “nobody remembers.”

It’s an awful thing to really try to serve and do your best and then nobody says thank you. Here is a group of people who loved the Lord and were saying thanks and cheering Him as He came into town. It was a parade which He, Himself, staged. Don’t any of you get any ideas of staging a parade for yourself, because He’s the Lord and we’re not. Maybe if it’s a problem sometimes to not get recognition, the converse of that is if we try to get recognition when we shouldn’t have it. I’m reminded of the story of the guy who was getting an honorary doctoral degree at a great university. The president introducing him said that this was a great man. He said, “Some of you would say he’s a very great man. I would say that he is a very, very great man.” After the degree had been awarded and the man was on his way home in the car, with his wife seated next to him, he said to her, “How many very, very great men do you think there are in the world?” She replied to him, “One less than you think there are.” It’s great to have people around us who keep us honest, isn’t it?

Jesus decided to have a parade, to be the grand marshal of that parade, and by doing so, He would make His statement about who He is and, in turn, about what our response to Him is to involve. The Easter Parade, the Palm Sunday parade, tells us volumes about who Jesus is and about where we fit with Him. We must always take a Scripture that is like, this that is historical—located in time and space, and geographical. We must take it out of history and geography and put it in our heart and write it in our experience and, somehow, let the words of this somehow seep through to the deep soil of our life and let it speak to us in our present moment of life. For the Scripture will have no living power if it simply remains as what

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happened to Jesus. It must have living power if it also includes us in the story. So we have a part in that parade.

In the text that we have read today, Jesus speaks four different times. Each time He speaks to or about a particular group. We will find ourselves, today in this audience, in one of these groups, as all humanity is in one of these groups.

### **I. The first word that Jesus speaks is a word to His disciples.**

In verses 28 through 36, it is a word He says to two of them, “Go over to the village opposite you (which Mark tells us is Bethphage—which is up on the eastern slope of Olives above Bethany). You will find a colt tied which no one has sat on. Untie it and bring it. If anyone asks you what you are doing, tell them the Lord has need of it.”

I want to focus on that phrase “the Lord has need of it.” Imagine the Lord, the one who identifies Himself as God, coming to you. He has to take something that is borrowed to be the main prop of His parade. It always amazes me, in looking at Jesus, to see the tremendous paradox that always swirls around Him. On the one hand, you know He has all power and all authority and can do anything to anyone and create any miracle that He wanted. And yet He has so purposely, time after time, put wraps around His power and called upon someone else to assist Him in His task.

A donkey. A king voluntarily so poor that the animal He rides on in His triumphal procession must be borrowed. Given our culture, a donkey doesn't seem to be worth a whole lot of money. You can get a part-time job, work at minimum wage, and within a few weeks have enough money set aside to ride a donkey. But who at their sixteen years of age wants to get a license to ride a donkey? So they're not so popular in our culture. But if you're over in the Middle East,

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even today, donkeys are very valuable things. In fact, the poor person often could not afford a donkey. So he went in cooperation with other owners and co-opted a donkey.

What we have in the Palm Sunday story is a co-opt donkey. Jesus refers to his owners—plural, not singular—as a group of people who were in common ownership of this donkey. It was so valuable because it hauled water, plowed the fields, did errands, they rode on it, and the like.

“The Lord has need of it.”

Jesus wants to use what we have. If we do not have a donkey, He's not going to ask us to use the donkey, but you know good and well if you serve Jesus at all, that there will be moments in which He's going to say to you and to me: “What you have, I want to use.”

He will say it of our house or our apartment. “I want to use your house... I want to use your apartment. I want it to not only be a place where you live, but I want it to be a place where the stranger is made comfortable. Where there is hospitality to the saints. Where there is Bible study and prayer. Where there is outreach and witness. I want to use your house.”

He may say, “I want to use your marriage. It's not just for the two of you. Your marriage is meant to heal others and be an extension for others.”

Or, “I want to use your children. Don't put limits on your children and what you're willing to let them do for Me. Say to them, ‘Whatsoever the Lord tells you to do, do it.’”

If you're single, the Lord may say to you, “I want to use your singleness. I want to use that.”

Maybe it's not something you've wanted. Maybe you're divorced or separated. Maybe you're not single by choice and the Lord is saying at this moment in your life, “I want to use you where you're at. I want to use your singleness.” Paul says the single person has a unique opportunity to serve the Lord, because of undivided time. We don't hear this a great deal in our culture, which is so narcissistic. We so seek to get dollars or to have fun. We forget that there may be special

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seasons of life where God allows us to be free of family responsibilities so He can say to us, "I want to use your time in a special way to reach the world and to bless My Body, the Church."

He may want to say, "I want to use your clothing." I have a friend who feels it's a special calling in his life, but he always wears Christian insignia on his clothes so he can have a conversation-piece to witness. He felt God speak to him directly and say to him, "I want to use your clothing."

God may say, "I want to use your money... I want to use your time... I want to use your automobile..."

Has it ever struck you how readily the owners let the colt go to Jesus? I think the reason why they let the colt go to Jesus is that the disciples came and said, "The Lord has need of it."

Bethphage is located just a stone's throw up above Bethany. Bethany means "house of the poor."

And Bethphage means "house of the early figs." There are those two villages sitting on the

eastern slope of Olivet, as it comes down towards the Dead Sea, down towards Jericho. Right at the top of Olivet is Bethphage with Bethany, right below everybody in the whole area. It's still a

small area today. In a small village, the news travels all over. Everybody knows down in

Bethany that Lazarus had been raised after being dead four days. Of course everybody knows

who the Lord is. That's why they're not at all unwilling or hesitant to let the colt go to Jesus. The

Lord asked for it.

What a difference when the Lord asks us! Maybe if the pastor asks us or some person in the

church asks us, we may hesitate. But if we sense the Lord is asking us, let there be no hesitancy

to let go of whatever it is He is asking. He may be asking you to let go of a relationship. He may

be asking you to let go of a romance. He may be asking you to let go of a business. He may be

asking you to let go of fear. Let it go! The Lord has need of what you have.

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To a disciple of Jesus, His entering on a donkey into Jerusalem signifies that He is the king promised by the prophets in Zechariah 9:9, "Behold your king comes to you riding on a colt." It signifies that He is on a mission of peace. Kings and ambassadors who rode horses and stallions were on a mission of war. But in biblical days, kings and ambassadors who rode on a donkey were on a mission of peace. Jesus is coming to bring the peace of heaven down to earth. He also comes with unnoticed power. His power is unnoticed by the masses, which do not realize at that moment He's riding on a colt that has never been ridden before. Have you ever tried to break in an animal? Some of you in this crowd have. I never have. I have never had the guts or the desire to get that many bones broken. But here is an unriden animal, not just out in a corral somewhere, but in the midst of a surging multitude of people who are throwing things on the animal, throwing things in front of the road, yelling, jumping up and down and screaming, and the Lord of all glory is coolly controlling His animal, as He goes up and down the Mount of Olives.

His power is often unnoticed. Jesus works that way. Not with a great deal of flash or PR, but He's the ruler. To the disciples, the entry into Jerusalem challenges us to remember who rules in our life, to ask ourselves, "Is Jesus indeed my king? Do I acknowledge Him as king? Am I in the cheering crowd? Am I among the ones who say, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'?"

There are some people who think the crowd who yelled, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" on Sunday are the same who turned around and said, "Crucify Him!" I've never bought that view. I think they're two different crowds. The crowd that yells, "Crucify Him!" is the Jerusalem crowd that never accepted Him anyway. This crowd includes people like Bartimaeus of Jericho, who's jumping up and down saying, "He gave me sight! I was blind all

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my life and He healed me!” And Lazarus, who was saying, “He raised me from the dead!” It’s filled with those who praise Him. They have experienced the peace of God, the peace of heaven coming down to earth. Am I His disciple? Do I exalt and praise His name? Do I make what is mine available to Him and put it at His disposal?

### **II. The second word the Lord speaks is to the Pharisees.**

These Pharisees represent those who oppose Jesus in verses 37 through 40. They say to Him, “Rabbi, Teacher, tell these disciples to be quiet.” No mortal should get the kind of recognition that You’re getting.” How prevalent that view is today, that Jesus is nothing more than a good moralist, a good teacher. He doesn’t deserve this accolade—Son of God, Lord, Christ, Messiah. But Jesus says to the religious opposition, “If these, My disciples, don’t cry out in praise to Me, the stones themselves will cry out in praise.”

I had a vivid experience, just a few days ago, where this Scripture became all the more meaningful to me. We were on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which since the seventh century has been in control of the Muslims. There is, on the Temple Mount today, the Dome of the Rock and a mosque and twenty-five to thirty acres or more of open courtyards and walls that surround these buildings. One of my favorite places in the Temple on the Mount is the Eastern Gate. It’s the gate that four centuries ago was blocked up by the Muslims with stone and mortar because of their perception of the Jewish and Christian belief which held that, when the Messiah entered Jerusalem, He would come in the Eastern Gate. So they weren’t going to let the Jewish Messiah or Christ come through the gate on His second return (the Christian Messiah). They put a cemetery on the outside, because the Messiah wouldn’t want to defile Himself by walking through a cemetery, and then blocked it off so He couldn’t get in anyway. And the great teacher in Muslim tradition will someday come through that gate.

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I like to go to the Eastern Gate. We all have background and roots. One of my roots is funerals in which the song was sung, “I will meet you in the morning, just inside the Eastern Gate over there. I will meet you... in the morning over there.” How are we going to find one another when we get to heaven? That’s what that song was about. It’s such a big place, how are we going to find everybody? “The one spot I know,” people would say, “is there’s got to be an Eastern Gate.” “I will meet you in the morning just inside the Eastern Gate.” So someday, inside the Eastern Gate, I’m going to meet mom and dad again and people I’ve loved. “I will meet you in the morning.”

I had a hymnal with me and we were going to go over there and sing. The tour guide said, “New rules. You can’t sing. Not only not sing, but you can’t read the Scripture and you can’t pray. It’s forbidden. Only Muslims can sing and pray up here.” I said, “I’d like to try to sing anyway.” They’ve made a rule now you can’t get near the Eastern Gate, although I did creep around the next day and touch it. But with a group, we were some yards away from it. The tour guide said to me, “Fine, if you want to try singing and get away with it. But I’ve got to leave the group, because if you sing and I’m here, I’m going to be in trouble.” So she walked away. I waited until she walked away and we cracked out our Holy Land hymnals and started to sing, “I will meet you in the morning.” We no sooner got to the fourth verse when a guard came over and said, “No sing!” We couldn’t praise the Lord in a corporate way on the Temple Mount.

Things haven’t changed in twenty centuries. The religious people in that day were telling the disciples of Jesus, “Don’t sing. Don’t praise Him!” and Jesus looks around. When you’re there today, everywhere you look it’s rock; that’s what the Mount of Olives is all about, one rock after another. And most of all, there’s a graveyard with stones and everybody and their brother’s been buried there. They want to be first up in the resurrection, so there’s an incredible amount of

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stones. Then there are the massive boulders and stones from Herod’s day that were at the base of the retaining wall—stone after stone. Stones in biblical days were meant to be silent witnesses to events. That is, when Joshua, for example, came into the Promised Land and miraculously crossed the Jordan River, the Lord gave orders that twelve stones be placed in the middle of the river, as a witness to the fact that God has accomplished His miracle there. Then the waters came back over them, but the stones were to be there as a witness. Jesus is saying that if human voices won’t praise Me, then inanimate things will.

He calls upon us to praise Him. Jesus sees praise as something that is spontaneous and exalted. He sees it as something natural for His followers. Not all of our praise as Christians is meant to be out of a hymnal, not all of it is meant to be together. Sometimes, we just need to say, from the depths of our soul, a hearty and unexpected and quite moving, “Praise the Lord!” I found, too, that people who praise the Lord cope better with life.

It’s hard, sometimes, to praise the Lord. Maybe you’re in that kind of a shape and you say, “What does the Triumphal Entry have to do with me?” It’s this: when we open our life to praise the Lord, it somehow keeps us in a good perspective on life. There are those who don’t like the idea of praising the Lord.

### **III. The third people that Jesus speaks to are the people who ignore Him, the city of Jerusalem.**

In verses 41 through 44, they don’t come out at all for the parade. They’re in the city. What a contrast of emotions. Here, Jesus is being surrounded by disciples, who Scripture says, “are joyfully praising God in loud voices.” This was a Pentecostal or charismatic meeting, if you will! It wasn’t like today, sung in a low tone of voice. It was bombastic and enthusiastic. Loud voices joyously saying, “The Messiah’s coming! Hosanna!”

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When you get close to Jesus, you see something. I still think you see this today in Jesus in the midst of all our praise to the Lord. You look at Him closely and, on that occasion, you see tears running down His face. What a contrast. Everybody else is shouting and rejoicing and Jesus is crying. Jesus wept over the city. Why does He weep?

He politically knows what's going to happen with the city. The city's filled with zealots. It's filled with people who believe in revolution and hatred, anger, striking out, overcoming your enemy through military force. Jesus knows that spirit of anger and sedition and overthrow is going to wind up costing the city its very life. Forty years down the road, Titus the Roman general comes against the city, surrounds it with ramparts as Jesus said would happen, puts a siege against it, starves the city out, and destroys it. A later successor of this, a hundred years after Jesus, Hadrian, knocks everything down and sows the city with salt, and later rebuilds it and gives it a pagan name. Jesus knows all this is going to happen and He weeps, because His message of love toward his enemies, and reconciliation and kindness and gentleness, is being spurned.

Force and power are always more attractive to us than humility and self-sacrifice and forgiveness. I think I understood something about Jesus' prophetic words in a little bit better sense after the space shuttle *Challenger* blew up a year ago this month. I think I may have mentioned this at the time. Who of us could ever forget the moment we became aware of that awful tragedy? In the news that ensued in later weeks, it turned out that some of the engineers who worked for the corporation that designed the shuttle booster had warned their superiors that there was a deficiency in the O-rings and that warning had been ignored. Because a warning had been ignored, seven people lost their lives.

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Jesus is the engineer of human life. He's the designer of human life. He's the designer of marriage. He's the designer of relationships. He's the designer of the spiritual existence of you and me. He knows He's dead right on what He says about life. And when we ignore His teaching, we're headed for disaster.

We're not only headed for our own personal disaster, but we do a lot of damage to people along the way. I've been pastor long enough to see the damage that people do to families and relationships when they quit listening to Jesus and get filled with the devil or too much of themselves. There is the Lord's way and then there's every other way. His way is a way that calls us to love, forgiveness, humility, self-sacrifice. And the other ways call us to "me first," anger, vindictiveness, hurt, retaliation. Jesus has a word to those who ignore Him. You do so at your own peril. And He's dead serious. And He weeps, because it's not something He gladly shares. It tears Him up.

### **IV. The fourth word that He speaks is to people who merchandise religion.**

In verses 45 through 58, these, again, are not at the parade. They're too busy at the outer court of the temple and the Court of the Gentiles, a vast area of many acres. Too busy making money on religion to pay any attention to Jesus. Too busy selling the premium animals that were guaranteed to pass inspection for sacrifice. Woe to you if you bring an animal from home or buy one outside the temple walls! It's likely that a defect would be found. So you get the high-grade animal, which costs you more inside the temple, where the moneychangers were. You pay the extra in getting your money changed into the currency that the temple alone accepts; the moneychangers had a monopoly on it. Anybody who's traveled to a third world country knows the difference between official rates and black market rates. Here we have, in the temple, the black market rates, which chisel people out of money.

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It's interesting that merchandisers of religion are not limited to first-century Judaism. They're present even in twentieth-century Christianity. Jesus warns anyone who attempts to make religious faith a matter of personal gain and profit that, in turn, surpasses people's true religious yearnings.

Maybe there was a need to sell animals to people who hadn't had the opportunity to get one.

Maybe there was need to exchange the coinage, but it was doing that at the cost of other people's worship—making the temple courts an absolute Babel of moneymaking and doing it for self-aggrandizement—that Jesus got upset about.

How do we take this manner of Jesus cleansing the temple and relate it to us?

The New Testament tells us that we are the temple of God. You and me. If we are God's temple, then it means that we have an outer court and we have an inner court, and we have a Holy place and we have a Holy of Holies. For me, the Holy of Holies is where I meet God alone in my own individuality, where God has access to that part of me to which no one else has access. The Holy place is when I'm with you, God's people. We're all holy, aren't we? We're saints.

We were in Israel and our host kept giving us sweets to eat on the bus. He'd say, "Don't worry about these. These are holy calories." So I ate a lot of holy calories. I love being around holy people, the saints in the inner court, but the outer court, that's where the traffic of life goes by.

That's where we work. That's where we live. That's our home, that's our apartment, that's our recreation, that's our leisure, that's our entertainment. Jesus is saying, "Don't turn that outer court into a Babel of noise and sound that omits Me. Integrate life. Let there be no divorce from the sacred and the secular. Bring the weekday world and the Sunday world together." He says to us—if we try to have a Holy Place and a Holy of Holies and yet, on the trappings of our external

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life just live any which way without Him—He strides into life, into our temples and says, “I want to clean you up. I want to make you honest. I want to make you honor Me in your everyday life.” If Christ were to arrive in the temple of our life, would anything stand in need of His correction? Why not let Him correct it now, while He will do it in mercy? Several times in these last few days in the Holy Land, we sang a song, “Were you there?” Pilate’s judgment hall, the pavement—we just spontaneously began to sing. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” I feel that way about this Scripture today. Somehow, it’s a powerful Scripture if we find ourselves in it. Yes, I am there. In the Palm Sunday parade, I am there. I could be there as a merchandiser of religion. I trust that will never be the case. I could choose to be there as a noninvolved person, simply watching it pass by and choosing to make no stand. I could even be there, I suppose, as one who opposes Jesus. Those are the people at the parade. But I want to be there as a disciple, doing His bidding, putting at His disposal what is mine and cheering, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, we say that today from our hearts. For just as You entered Jerusalem You enter our lives and You come, wanting to bring peace to us. And we who follow You today join in that ancient throng in exalting and praising Your name, for all Your wonderful deeds to us. If there are friends in this service, Lord, who’ve stayed in the city and haven’t come out for the parade, that is, if in their own life, they’ve never had a conscious moment to acknowledge You as Lord, I pray that today would be that day to acknowledge You from their heart. For Jesus, You are the one who comes in the name of God Almighty. In the name of the Lord. No one else knows the Father except You. No one can unite us to the Father except You. We hear Your Word for us today. And we say, from our heart, “Blessed is He.” And, Lord, it may be, too, in our life that

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there is something of ours that You want to press into Your service. Maybe it's something that we don't even see how You can use. But You want to have it for a while, maybe for a lifetime. We want to say again, Lord, "Here we are. Not part of us but all of us, given to You. Take our lives and let them be holy consecrated Lord to Thee." In this New Year, Lord, we pray that our entire life and everything that relates to our life will be given to You. Thank You for coming. Thank You for Your presence here with us. As we come now to some moments of prayer, Holy Spirit, we ask You to change and energize, to minister Jesus to us, to bring the gifts of healing and salvation and joy to every heart. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.