

“Duh!”

This letter was sent to the Dear Abby newspaper column: “I am a 23 year-old liberated woman who has been on the pill for 2 years. It’s getting pretty expensive and I think my boyfriend should share half the cost, but I don’t know him well enough to discuss money with him.” I don’t know about you, but the word that comes to my mind is: “Duh!”

Sometimes we humans just don’t “get it”, do we? Here are some examples.

“My husband and I went through the McDonald's driveway window and I gave the cashier a \$5 bill. Our total was \$4.25, so I also handed her 25c. She said, ‘you gave me too much money.’ I said, ‘Yes I know, but this way you can just give me a dollar back.’ She sighed and went to get the manager who asked me to repeat my request. I did so, and he handed me back the 25c, and said ‘We're sorry but we don’t do that kind of thing.’ The cashier then proceeded to give me back 75 cents in change. Do not confuse the people at MickyD's.”

“I was checking out at the local Foodland with just a few items and the lady behind me put her things on the belt close to mine. I picked up one of those dividers that they keep by the cash register and put it between our things so they wouldn’t get mixed up. After the girl had scanned all of my items, she picked up the divider, looking it all over for the bar code so she could scan it. Not finding the bar code she said to me, ‘Do you know how much this is?’ and I said to her, ‘I’ve changed my mind, I don’t think I’ll buy that today.’ She said “Ok” and I paid her for the things and left.”

“I was in a car dealership a while ago, when a large motor home was towed into the garage. The front of the vehicle was in dire need of repair and the whole thing generally looked like an extra in (the movie) Twister. I asked the manager what had happened. He told me that the driver had set the cruise control switch and then went in the back to make a sandwich.”

“I was at the airport, checking in at the gate when an airport employee asked, ‘Has anyone put anything in your baggage without your knowledge?’ To which I replied, ‘If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?’ He smiled knowingly and nodded, ‘That's why we ask.’”

“One of my favorites took place not too far away. Police in Radnor, PA interrogated a suspect by placing a metal colander on his head and connecting it with wires to a photocopy machine. The message ‘He’s lying’ was placed in the copier, and police pressed the copy button each time they thought the suspect wasn’t telling the truth. Believing the ‘lie detector’ was working, the suspect confessed.” Duh!

This is not to ridicule people, for isn’t it true we all at times “just don’t get it”! Most of us qualify for a spot in the “Duh Hall of Fame”! Heaven knows I’ve said and done my share of clueless things!

The Scriptures we’re looking at today describe a “duh” experience, but not a very funny one. It has to do with Jesus coming into Jerusalem as the Messiah. We begin by looking at some verses in the thirteenth chapter of Luke’s gospel, describing events that take place *before* Jesus rides

into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Verses 31 and 32 say this: “At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.’”” Some of the Pharisees (of all people!) warned Jesus that King Herod wants to kill Him. Jesus says Herod and his threats won’t hinder His plans. Luke continues: “Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, for it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (verse 33). Jesus knew His next trip to Jerusalem would be His last. He would be killed. Jesus’ words continue in verse 34, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Jesus grieves over the holy city Jerusalem. It is the center of the Hebrew faith, where He should have been welcomed with open arms as Messiah. Instead, He will be killed. *They just didn’t get it!*

Jesus says He would have gathered them as a mother hen gathers her chicks. A man tells of when he was a boy visiting his grandfather’s farm in British Columbia. The hen house burned. As they were sorting through the wreckage, he came upon a hen lying near the door of the hen house. Her top feathers had been singed brown by the fire, her neck was limp. The young boy bent down to pick up the dead hen, but as he did, he felt movement. The hen’s four chicks came scurrying out from beneath the dead mother’s burned body.

Jesus’ protective love for the Holy City, Jerusalem, for the Hebrew people, for *all people*, was like that! He was about to give up His life for our salvation, but people couldn’t see it! *They didn’t want to see it!* “You were not willing” (verse 34) he says.

On the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem there is a chapel commemorating this Scripture. The sides of the chapel are in the shape of tears. Inside is a mosaic of a white hen with a halo and wings spread out, and chicks gathered at her feet – a picture that shows what might have been if Jesus had been received. The words of this Scripture are written in Latin and the last phrase is set apart in red: “and you were not willing” (verse 34). Here’s this incredible self-sacrificing love of Jesus, but the people didn’t get it. *Duh!*

Not long after this Jesus gets on a donkey, rides into Jerusalem amid the waving of palm branches and shouts of “Hosanna!” “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Luke continues the Palm Sunday account in this way: “As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19:41). As one descends the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem there is a magnificent view of Jerusalem. Perhaps it was there that Jesus looked down over the holy city and *wept*. The word for “wept” suggests not a few sniffles, but *intense, gut-wrenching sobs*.

As Jesus grieves over the city He says, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42). Jesus came bringing a message about a kingdom of peace and love – where people truly cared about one another. But most of the Jews were looking for a Messiah who would lead them in a revolt against Rome.

Jesus continues, “Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God (verses 43-44). This prophecy of Jesus came true! In A.D. 70 the Roman armies stormed Jerusalem and destroyed the city.

If people had understood that He came to bring peace and good will, and followed this kind of Messiah, Jerusalem’s fate would have been different. *But they just didn’t get it!* I like how *The Message* renders Luke 19:44: “All this because you didn’t recognize and welcome God’s personal visit.” Later on, John, in writing his gospel, says this: “The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him” (John 1:9-11). *Duh!*

I guess we really need to ask, “Is it any different today?” I don’t think it is. God visits us in the Person of Jesus, and we miss Him and His significance! For instance, ***God sent Jesus into the world to save us from our sins.*** “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem *to die for you* – and me – and everyone. So we can be forgiven of all our sins, and brought back into a relationship with God. So we can be given a new life in Christ that will last forever!

In the U.S. we are fortunate to have that message available in many ways. We have Bibles, we have churches, we have Christian preachers on radio and TV. We have Christian books and magazines. And yet there are many ways that this message of salvation in Christ can pass us by.

We can just be so busy that we never get around to taking Christ seriously. We’re too busy to go to church, too occupied to read the Bible. We can be too self-focused or too immersed in our day-to-day obligations to consider Christ and His message. How many families spend the weekend going all over the place to tournaments for their kids who play baseball or soccer or ice hockey. The church is not even on their radar screen. Or Sunday morning is the day to sleep in, or catch up on house chores or yard work or grocery shopping.

We can miss Him when we have a vague belief in a mild, tamed down Jesus. A lot of people consider themselves “Christians” – they believe in Jesus, sort of like they believe in George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Jesus was an historical figure, but that’s the extent of their belief. Or we can accept that Jesus was a wise teacher, a gifted prophet, a moral example, a kind and gentle religious leader, but don’t recognize Jesus as the unique Son of God, in whom alone is salvation. We can fail to grasp what a dynamic, radical Person He was! He said we have to give our *all* to follow Him; it will cost us, it will change us. But we will truly *live!*

Jerusalem was the religious center of the Jews, God’s people. The spiritual leaders there who should have welcomed the Messiah rejected Him. And it broke Jesus’ heart. He wept.

Jesus offered His love. And it was snubbed. It must break His heart when someone simply *ignores* what He's done – or just doesn't have much interest in Christ or time for Him. Or, we just flatly say, “no thanks” to His incredible love. Imagine a young man in love. He's been saving money to buy his sweetheart a diamond ring. The big moment comes. He hands her this little jewelry case with the engagement ring inside. He says with all his heart, I love you, and want to marry you! I want to live the rest of my life with you. You mean more to me than anyone else in the world. I want to commit all I am and all I have to you!” At that the young lady puts the box aside and ignores it. “What's on TV tonight?” she says. Or she flippantly says, “I think I'll drive out to the outlets and do some shopping.” Or, she looks at the ring, and then hands it back: “Sorry. I didn't know you were this serious. I have plans for my life, but they don't include you.” (Or the clincher, “I'm not interested in marriage. Let's just be friends.”). Imagine how heart broken this young suitor would feel.

Don't miss the love Jesus has for you, nor what Jesus has done for you! Give your all to Him.

But there's another way we can miss the presence and significance of Jesus. That is when ***Christ comes to us in the needs of our neighbor.*** Do you remember the story Jesus told found in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats? Jesus teaches that on Judgment Day some are rewarded, while others are condemned. And the verdict is based on how we respond to the needy around us: “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’” (Matthew 25:34-36). These righteous people ask in response, “When did we do this to *you*?” The Lord answers: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (verse 40).

Sometimes we ask, “How can I serve Jesus? How can I do God's will? And we make it too complicated. Is there somebody around us who needs help? Food? Clothing? A visit? Some person who is sick, someone new to church or community we could welcome? *That's Jesus*, coming to us in the needs of those around us! Isn't it ironic that we can be so wrapped up in Bible studies, church meetings, doing a lot of religious things to get closer to Christ, when we might not even see Him in the face of that person who needs our help or love. *Duh!*

Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem as the Savior of the world. But the eyes of many were blind to Jesus, who He was, and what He came to accomplish.

Let me suggest that we can be blind to what Jesus is doing in the Church. Tremendous changes are taking place in the church across North America. Mainline denominations like the United Methodist Church have been in serious decline for the last 40-50 years. In many congregations, there are few or no children or youth. The average age of members, in some churches, is 60 or 70 or even older. Membership, worship attendance, giving is declining. Many churches simply are in survival mode.

But on the other hand there are congregations with children and youth and young families. New people coming into church. The church is growing. There's a strong sense of mission and purpose that energizes the people in that congregation. The Spirit of Christ is doing something pretty significant in the church today! And I think the key to all of this is: Where churches are willing to change, good things can happen! The world is changing, our culture is changing at breakneck speed. Churches that don't take this into account, and try to do things as they've always done them, are left in the dust

One of the big changes that has to be considered is in the area of *music and worship*. Younger people, by and large, have little or no interest in traditional hymns and a traditional style of church worship. Yet, a lot of church people just don't get it.

I retired from a church that experienced significant growth. I remember one Sunday morning an elderly member who attended one of our traditional services poking his head in the door of the sanctuary as our praise band was playing for the contemporary service – the service that got the most people, especially younger people. He had a disgusted look on his face, because we were playing more upbeat music in the church (with *drums*). I looked at this man, and his stubborn resistance to change and his hardness of heart, and felt a wave of sadness come over me. I thought to myself, he just doesn't "get it". (Soon afterwards, he and his wife left that church).

One of the other areas where churches need to be willing to change is to move from focusing on what *those of us already in the church* like and need, to considering the interests and the needs of *those outside the church*, and how to connect them to the gospel message.

Churches by nature become self-centered and self-serving. We develop programs and ministries that suit our tastes and meet our needs. But Jesus commanded the church to *go out* and make disciples. He said we have to be willing to *give up* our life for the sake of the gospel if we're to find our life! It seems as though Jesus is blessing and honoring those churches whose focus is *on the people they want to reach*, rather than just taking care of those *already in the fold*. But many in the church just don't get this! I guess you could say they are not ***disciples***....but rather ***duh-ciples!***

“As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it...” (Luke 19:41). But we don't have to make Jesus cry! We can bring a smile to Jesus' face and joy to His heart when we welcome Him as our Savior and commit ourselves fully to Him, and when we respond to Him as He comes to us in the needs of those around us, and when we affirm and embrace what He's up to in the church today.

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