

## **Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray,

Gracious God, illumine these words by your Spirit that we might hear what you would have us hear and be who you would us be, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Our scripture for today comes from the gospel of Luke, chapter 19, verses 28 - 40. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

**28** After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. **29** When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, **30** saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" **32** So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" **34** They said, "The Lord needs it." **35** Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. **36** As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. **37** As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, **38** saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" **39** Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." **40** He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

These past few weeks have felt heavy. As the war in Ukraine continues so do the feelings of fear, grief, and horror as the death count rises - currently an estimate of 1500 Ukrainian civilians have been killed. It's a lot to carry and process. At the same time... life continues on.

We who are so fortunate to not be in the dangers of war - our life continues. Thus, in many ways - it feels strange to celebrate Christ's triumphant arrival today.

Is it right to celebrate anything when the reality of the world and its future feels so bleak? Joy and fear, celebration and grief, the deep contrasts of our lives these days. Really the contrasts of our lives these past two years. As we have all gone through so much.

Palm Sunday is a day that knows these contrasts all too well. It *is* a day where we celebrate with joy Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We have waved our palms and sang hosanna - praising our Lord and Savior.

Yet... Jesus is riding to his death.

As he enters Jerusalem on this colt he enters his final days. And the crowd who joyously receives Christ the King riding in on a colt, the crowd who lays down their coats for him and declares him king, is also the crowd that will scream for his blood on the cross. Who will demand his crucifixion.

A contrast indeed. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a highly symbolic and intentional act. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing and it comes to pass exactly as he says.

He tells his disciples to go ahead into the village where they will find an unriden colt. They are to untie it and bring it back to him. and if anyone asks - say "the Lord needs it".

And that is exactly what happens. The disciples go and find the colt, untie it, and when the owners ask essentially what are you doing - they tell them, "The lord needs it."

Every detail about this entry is important because it fulfills the prophecy in the scriptures of the Messiah. Jesus comes down from the Mount of Olives, for that is the traditional site where the Messiah would appear.

The colt he rides on the journey fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 "Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The crowds shout "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the lord", which is a reference to Psalm 118. The crowd throw their cloaks on the ground - cloaks are a symbol of welcoming a king of Israel.

When some of the pharisees protest and ask Jesus to stop, Jesus responds "if these were silent, the stones would shout out" - it is a reference to the prophetic warning Habakkuk 2:9-11 - the very stones of the house built on corruption will cry out from the wall.

Injustice will not prevail. Jesus is showing that he is the Messiah, fulfilling the prophecies of old - but also about to do a new thing that cannot be stopped.

This is reflected even in a more nuanced detail - the unbroken colt. Who willingly and deliberately rides an unbroken colt? It is wild and dangerous. Certainly not suited for a King. Yet Christ is able to ride it - a miracle in and of itself.

The colt becomes obedient to Christ just as Christ is obedient to God's will for him. Even the danger riding the unbroken colt perhaps reflects the dangerous road ahead for Christ - yet a danger he takes on willingly.

Here, in his symbolic trip into Jerusalem, Jesus is also making a clear statement about power. Kingly processions into cities were normal. Kings or Emperors would usually ride in on mighty steeds with their army after violent military conquests. The procession in claimed the territory as their own. It was a show of their power. This power and glory gained through violence.

Since many were living on conquered land during this time, they likely had seen these processions. In fact, there were actually two processions into Jerusalem that Passover week.

From the west came Pilate, as Stephen Shoemaker describes, "draped in the gaudy glory of imperial power: horses, chariots, and gleaming armor." He moved in with the army at the beginning of passover week to make sure nothing got out of hand. Insurrection was in the air with the memory of God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. He came in with power. The power of empire. The power of Rome.

But from the east came Jesus. A commoner's procession: Jesus riding in an ordinary robe riding on an unbroken colt. No military around him.

Jesus was making a clear statement on power - in the coming of God's kingdom - God's power came not from violent conquest, but from peaceful, nonviolent resistance. A type of peace that will dismantle the ways of war. Jesus' humble entry was a peaceful, political act, a protest against the ways of empire, the violent power of empire.

So much so that some of the Pharisees beg Jesus to stop because it would attract too much attention from Roman authorities that were usually posted nearby during passover. It was too much of a statement - too disruptive.

We too are familiar with processions. Take the inaugural parade for a president when they are sworn into office. All of the fanfare and extravagance.

Think of processions in the United Kingdom for the royal family - arguably even more extravagance.

Both point to the power and symbolism each office holds.

Now imagine going to these processions - maybe some of you actually have. And then imagine being in the crowd, seeing Jesus riding in on a colt and hearing everyone declare him king. How strange it must have seen.

Now remember...the crowd watching, the disciples who did not know what was coming next.

Even though Jesus had warned them, the disciples did not understand.

Maybe some in the crowd were encountering this king for the first time - what would they have thought of Jesus - this one they call king yet nothing about him seems kingly?

What would they think about him in the days to come? For the Jewish people, Jerusalem was the point of contact between Heaven and Earth.

Jesus rides triumphant into this place between Heaven and Earth showing us what the true peace and power and Glory of God is - not the glory of Empire.

Peace that disrupts power. Not a peace attained by power, but a peace by self-sacrificing, vulnerable, all consuming love.

In Jesus' time peace was attained by war. By nations conquering the other to set the new status quo.

The reality is, for us now thousands of years later, nothing has changed. For us too, peace is attained by war. The land we stand on this very moment, this land we live on in *peace* - was stolen and then kept through war.

Where is the peace of Christ today? Where is that place where Heaven and earth collide?

While the crowd may rejoice in this peace that Christ shows them - this point of contact between heaven and in Earth, immediately following our scripture today - Jesus arrives in the city and begins to weep.

“As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

The People, his disciples, rejoice in his peace, but fail to see the way to achieve it. Falling instead, to worldly peace, the peace of empire not the peace of Christ.

A contrast indeed.

Today is a day to give thanks to Christ our King who shows us the way of peace. For Christ the King IS our peace. We wave joyously in the crowd to welcome his entry into Jerusalem.

We celebrate his peace, but as Christ enters the city, we too, succumb to the ways of power.

Would Christ weep over our world? I think he would.

But in the contrasts of Palm Sunday - I think, too, that we do see places here today where heaven and earth collide.

Where the peace of Christ dismantles violent power. And I have hope in the ways we can see it today - we can see it in the peaceful protests against the war in Ukraine.

Following in the tradition of the civil rights movement - the ways radical peace and nonviolence can change the world, the peace of Christ can change the world.

Peace that dismantles power.

In Russia, thousands of Russian citizens have been arrested - peacefully protesting the war even though it knowingly puts them in danger.

We have seen these demonstrations all around the world. Can we have hope that following in the footsteps of the peace of Christ, the triumph of the humble entry on the colt, can really change the world?

Today we do celebrate Christ, our Peace. We stand amongst the crowd, throwing our coats on the ground to welcome Christ the King.

But we do so humbly, knowing all too often that, when we lose sight of Christ and fall to the ways of power, we are also among the crowd that demands his death.

In humility, knowing this, I charge us all as Holy Week begins to thus not rush to Easter. don't go from the triumphant entry today straight to the resurrection next Sunday. Let us journey to Maundy Thursday as he breaks bread for the last time, as he washes his disciples feet knowing they will betray him, to Good Friday as he is beaten, stripped, humiliated, nailed to a cross, and crucified all while his own people - the very people who shouted for joy and declared him king - are the ones who scream for his blood, to Holy Saturday - to take a moment to pause and grieve the silence of his death.

For if we don't, then we forget this point of contact between heaven and earth is here today - we need only live into the peace of Christ. Not a peace gained by power, but by radical and vulnerable love.

May we be brave enough to seek it. For then Easter morning comes to us and to a world truly transformed.

Thanks be to God. Amen.