

April 9, 2017

Palm Sunday

## Now Jesus Arrives

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Luke 19:29-44

*<sup>29</sup> When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" <sup>34</sup> They said, "The Lord needs it." <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> saying,*

*"Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

*<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." <sup>40</sup> He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."*

*[Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem]*

*<sup>41</sup> As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> 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."*

In Luke 19, Jesus weeps over a city that does not know peace, that *cannot* know peace so long as it refuses to recognize the things that make for peace. What *things make for peace*? Welcoming the stranger; caring for the poor; NOT making alliances with nations on the prowl to take over the world – opportunities for peacemaking that once existed for you Jerusalem, but are now gone, hidden from you, while your eyes were looking

elsewhere and your heart was hoping for something other than the peace to be made in recognizing that God is here, now, among us and active and dependable, in these ordinary lives as we move through this extraordinary world.

No more passion markers. Jesus has arrived. As of Luke 19:29, his passion is in motion – and staged in ways that well-versed Jews would have recognized from Zechariah 9:9 and 2 Kings 9:13: Jesus enters Jerusalem like a king who has already conquered the city. Welcomed by a citizenry hoping for his benevolence. Picture the liberation of Paris in 1944 – except, in Luke 19 there was no invasion, there weren't any battles; yet Jesus is claiming victory.

Luke says it: the multitude of his disciples sang with joy, praising God for the deeds of power they had seen him do. Do you remember any of those deeds of power? Or the people who experienced them?

- the centurion whose slave was healed;
- the widow at Nain whose son was brought back to life;
- the woman at Simon's house whom Jesus forgave;
- the man whose son had epilepsy – the disciples couldn't heal him but Jesus did;
- the lawyer who wanted to know how little he could do and still be considered faithful;
- the blind beggar and the tax collector of Jericho.

And so many more, no doubt excited to see Jesus again. And at Passover in Jerusalem! What could be better?!

Jerusalem swelled with tourists there to celebrate the holiday! A festival with every kind of attraction, including Jesus. *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, glory in the highest heaven!"* They sing, just as Jesus said they would sing, when he told of this day.

Tourists aren't the only ones in Jerusalem. Police too. Lots and lots of extra security. Temple police and Roman soldiers temporarily assigned to Jerusalem because of the high security risk. (Just like now, like the Women's March on Washington. There were National Guard soldiers everywhere, just in case.)

His Pharisee friends point them out to Jesus, *"Dude, tell your people to stop."* Consider their language: *Blessed is the King*. Some MIGHT think this was Roman rebel talk. Seditious. Jesus declines. *"Doesn't matter,"* he tells them; *"if they didn't say it, these very stones would shout the same truth."* Why? Because the passion is no longer some future event. It's now and here and in motion, before their eyes. The season of anticipation is over.

From here, gospel characters participate or get out of the way. The Pharisees exit here at verse 39, never to return to Luke's gospel. Gradually, nearly everyone with Jesus leaves.

Here, on day one, many disciples are still close – watching Jesus as he comes within sight of the city and begins to weep over her.

How Jesus doesn't weep over every city, of every country, every single day, is a mystery to me. Syria, the infant graveyard of the world, seems to me like enough for God to give up on all of us once and for all.

I would offer that one way to read this text is to imagine *Jerusalem* standing in for all the cities of all times and places which exist at some point on this continuum of inevitable self-destruction resulting from humanity's outright refusal or our passive declination to recognize that Jesus has arrived. And further, that human failure to recognize the presence of Jesus is evident in three particular human behaviors:

- chronic consumption;
- routine fear;
- habitual sin.

Except, who wants to hear whole sermons on what failures we are? I don't want to preach them. I don't want to go to church where all we talk about is how NOT to be, what NOT to do, and what God hates.

Our life together is staged on the assumption of God's abiding loving, ever affectionate, always leading presence. We preach and pray and study and sing, convinced God is here, God is active, God loves us, and we are changed. How? Oodles of ways – of which I've three for you to take home today. Because three is enough for a Sunday as beautiful as this one.

Convinced of God's presence and activity in the world here and now, we walk through this world knowing and living as people

- with everything we need;
- with nothing to fear;
- free to be good.

My middle child, 21 years old, hasn't graduated from college yet. He said to me the other day, "*Sometimes I think I should have been a doctor.*" He said it wistfully, as though all his good years are already wasted and gone! As residents on this particular patch of the planet, we live in nearly constant earshot of a message that goes something like this: *You only have so much time. Therefore, you need to work hard and secure your future. You need to keep yourself physically and mentally fit enough to maximize your productive years.*

My son hasn't begun his adult life and already feels a pinch of anxiety over *not having enough timmmme*. We've been duped into believing time can be saved, like coins in a

piggy bank. It cannot. When the day is over, those minutes and hours are gone. We don't get to keep them for the next day, save them up until we have an eight-day week.

Just like we **NEED** more time, we **NEED** more energy, we **NEED** more money. We **NEED**. We **NEED**. We **NEED**, the world tells us every day all day. And we can be tempted to believe it, because it feels very, very true. And it IS true, for OTHER people! Not for us. Because in Christ, we know, we already have all we need. He is enough. It's a big thing to believe, that we can lose everything precious to us, but having Christ we can live, and even thrive.

Fearing nothing helps. It helps hugely. If we fear nothing, being hungry is nothing. Being alone or in danger or embarrassed is nothing. If we fear nothing, our greatest losses hurt – terribly. But in Christ, pain can be borne. Having everything and fearing nothing, we are free. Free, most of all it seems to me, to be good; to be full of kindness and generosity toward people expecting no reward; to do right toward people who do us wrong; to tolerate injury and brush off insult, knowing that other people are as broken as we are, and that our deepest trust and our faith are in Jesus. And with all these brothers and sisters, what we are doing – essentially – is helping each other find our way home.

Why are people not good? Specifically, why are good people sometimes not good? REALLY not good? Maybe because it's tempting to start believing the voices telling us we don't have enough and there is much to fear, that being productive or prepared is a better plan than being good. But that's not what we came to hear. Nor what Jesus went to Jerusalem to say. Or do. He came that we have all we need, forever. That we never need be afraid, ever. And that we always, always, always know how free we are – to be good, as he is good.

Would you pray with me?