

Hailing the King
Luke 19:29-44
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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April 9, 2017 (Palm Sunday)

Luke 19:29-44

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” just say this: “The Lord needs it.”’ So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 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, saying,

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

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’

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. 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.’

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say, ‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Well, we're here. The journey that started six weeks and ten chapters ago, back on Ash Wednesday, when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem,"¹ has arrived there. Another way of looking at it is that the journey started sixteen weeks and eighteen chapters ago. in Nazareth of Galilee, when an angel came to have a talk with a young woman named Mary.² We have been following this story through Luke's Gospel since before Christmas.

The first part of our Gospel reading this morning is familiar. We tell this story every year. Jesus sends two of his disciples to find him a donkey that has never been ridden, and he rides it into Jerusalem, like a victorious king of old Israel. People spread their cloaks and tree branches on the road. One of the other Gospels says that they wave palm branches in the air, which is why you all have palm branches this morning. (wave palm branches)

Jesus is leading a parade of his disciples. If we are followers of Jesus, we belong in the parade, saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus is leading, though, so he chooses the parade itinerary and the route.

The Pharisees in the crowd tell Jesus to order his disciples to stop yelling and making such a big celebration. They fear disruption of the *status quo*. Jesus does not do as they ask. He tells the Pharisees that, if these people were silent, the very stones would shout out.

¹ Luke 9:51.

² Luke 1:26-38.

Then Jesus does something that only Luke fully describes. As he is riding toward the city, Jesus *laments*.

Lament is more than just crying. Lament is more than just weeping, though that's the word our translators were forced to default to. Lament is more than that. The theologian Fred Craddock explains that "A lament is a voice of love and profound caring, of vision of what could have been and of grief over its loss, of tough hope painfully releasing the object of its hope, of personal responsibility and frustration, of sorrow and anger mixed, of accepted loss, but with energy enough to go on."³

Jesus is feeling a complex mix of love and pain and grief and loss of what could have been. Can you imagine what might have happened if all of Judea had recognized the things that made for peace?

The things that make for peace do not include more violence. If redemptive violence, or the idea that, "only blood can wash out blood," brought peace, then surely enough blood has been spilled in its name to make it happen.⁴ Calling a weapon, a "Peacemaker," does not make it so.⁵

The things that make for peace do not include oppression and fear. The parade route goes past the Temple, where Jerusalem and the Temple priests have allied themselves with the so-called *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. This "peace" was civil law and order, brutally enforced by

³ Craddock, Fred B. 1990. *Luke*. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press. p.229.

⁴ The myth of redemptive violence goes back at least as far as *The Code of Hammurabi*, the earliest known written system of laws.

⁵ There was a model of Colt revolver called a Peacemaker, and a bomber, and a model of MX missile. None of them, it must be noted, brought about a lot of peace.

the legions to the exclusion of anything else, including any pretense of justice, fairness, or kindness. Even at the time, the historian Tacitus said, “They plunder, they slaughter, and they steal: this they falsely name Empire, and where they make a devastation, they call it peace.”⁶

It took a while to finally fall apart completely, but the *Pax Romana* was doomed the minute that the Roman legions ceased to be seen as an overwhelming military force. Jesus knew that. Roman statesmen knew that. I suspect that Pilate knew that – it was part of his problem.

The Romans found that their quote-unquote “peace” though oppression and fear was not real peace. It was merely delaying hostilities until another time. Thirty-five years after Jesus’ death, the war that the Pharisees feared came. Jerusalem was devastated, just as Jesus foresaw. The Temple was destroyed, leaving only the Wailing Wall.⁷

After a few centuries, the Roman Empire fell apart in a series of brutal wars. Rome experienced the same kind of devastation that Jerusalem had.

Rome, too, had not recognized the things that made for peace.

Where does Jesus lament for us and for our world today? Jesus profoundly loves us and our world, but he laments what could have been. He grieves that the world, and we, are not what God created us to be.

Just as he did that day nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus laments when we do not recognize the things that make for peace.

⁶ Tacitus, *Agricola* (98). My translation of “*Aufferre, trucidare, rapere, falsis nominibus imperium; atque, ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*” These are words that Tacitus put into the mouth of the Caledonian chieftain Calgacus, addressing assembled warriors about Rome’s insatiable appetite for conquest and plunder.

⁷ A summary can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Jewish%E2%80%93Roman_War

So, what are the things that make for peace? Jesus taught them to anyone who would listen, and he lamented that no one seemed to learn.

Jesus taught us that the most important thing is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul, and the second is to love our neighbors like ourselves.⁸ We do praise God with our words, but loving God that much means that both God and our neighbors should be more important than our money, more important than our political positions, more important than our reputations. Jesus modeled that for us.

Jesus was always eating and drinking with people, making no distinction between the people who were on the inside, and those who were on the outside. A tax collector named Levi, and another named Zacchaeus.⁹ A Samaritan woman, and then her whole Samaritan village.¹⁰ Ordinary people like Mary and Martha.¹¹ Jesus even ate with Pharisees, the highly respectable insiders. Those respectable insiders accused him of being indiscriminate, and of being a drunk and a glutton.¹²

Experience teaches that eating together, at the same table, reveals to all of us our common humanity. When we eat together, it is an opportunity to listen. Not to listen, as we too often do, for the purpose of replying, but to listen for the purpose of understanding.

Listening to understand breaks down the walls that we build between us. It reduces that sense of “Us versus Them,” in favor of a common “Us.”

It changes how we see each other. We start to see each other all on the same level, not as incomprehensible distant figures, but as human beings like ourselves. It is harder to see someone

⁸ Matthew 22:34-40.

⁹ Luke 5:27-32; Luke 19:1-10, respectively.

¹⁰ John 4:4-42.

¹¹ Luke 10:25-42.

¹² Luke 5:30; Luke 7:31-35.

with whom you ate dinner last week as the enemy, or as a threat, and easier to see her or him as a friend.

It is not a coincidence that much of Jesus' teaching seemed to take place at dining tables. It is not a coincidence that Jesus ate his last meal with those whom he loved, and we will celebrate that meal together later this week. It is not a coincidence that this congregation, like most Christian congregations, tries to eat together on a regular basis.

When we eat together, and, more importantly, when we really listen to each other, we really see each other. We really hear each other. It becomes possible for us to keep God's commandment to love our neighbors. It is possible to be infatuated with someone you just met, but you can't genuinely love someone you don't know.

Eating together as just us, though, is not enough. Listening to each other in this room is not enough. We need to do more to be with, and to listen to, the people who are not here on Sunday morning. Jesus' parade route does not just come to church. The route goes through our families' living rooms, and through the Hilltop, and through the Senior Center and the public library and the school. Wherever God's wayward children go, it seems, there goes Jesus. We need to catch up!

We live in a world increasingly divided into opposing echo chambers, with precious little real listening going on. That makes it difficult to recognize the things that make for peace. Jesus laments that. He grieves our divisions and the walls that we build between us.

So, this next week, hail the King. Praise God, for God has done marvelous things.

But, like the people in the parade, we need to follow Christ where he goes. We don't get to choose the parade route.

The parade route includes eating with people with whom we disagree. It includes listening, really listening, to people who don't look like us, or sound like us, and who may want to tell us things that we do not want to hear. And it includes being open to them as our brothers and sisters, our fellow children of God.

These, my sisters and brothers, are the things that lead to peace. The peace that Jesus wants for all of us.

Let's pick up our palm branches, and repeat after me: "Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!"

AMEN.