

King of Peace
Rev. Frank Allen
First Presbyterian Church, Kissimmee, Florida

March 20, 2016

Luke 19:28-40

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.”

A KING

Last week we learned that despite dire threats from the powers that be, Jesus and his disciples are going to Passover. They’re close to Jerusalem now, and Jesus makes an unusual request.

He tells two of his disciples,

“Go into the next village. In that village you’ll find a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. And if anyone questions you about this just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

So, the disciples go into the village.

They find the colt.

They tell the folks who have questions that the Lord needs it.

And then they bring this young donkey to Jesus.

They throw their cloaks on on the animal, and they set Jesus on it.

What’s going on here?

Apparently Jesus has been planning this entry into Jerusalem for some time.

But, why?

Jesus has been walking for all these days.

Why does he need to ride this young donkey into the city?

What’s the point?

The disciples know exactly why Jesus is doing this.

He is acting out the words of the prophet Zechariah.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

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.”
(Zechariah 9:9)

Jesus doesn't hide from those who would do him harm. He openly challenges them.

By his action he is proclaiming himself to be king.

The parable that precedes our lesson for today is a stern warning to those who would reject the king. And now Jesus says it plainly by what he does, "I am the king. Deal with it."

POLITICAL DYNAMITE

Imagine the scene.

The city is filled with people from all over who have come to celebrate the Passover.

This was like a religious fourth of July celebration in the nation's capital. Passover commemorated the nation's liberation from slavery many years ago.

The crowds are filled with patriotic zeal.

They remember a time when God delivered his people from Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth.

And if God had done this once, God could do it again.

So, how do you think this made the Roman soldiers feel? They were on edge. They were on the lookout for troublemakers.

The Roman governor has left his palace in Caesarea and has made his way to Jerusalem.

He would take charge in case there was a riot.

Recent history suggested that this was entirely possible.

And so into this politically charged scene,
Jesus rides into Jerusalem.
He acts out the hopes of those who want to see the Holy City free again.

The disciples get it.
That's why they cheer so loudly.
That's why they lay their cloaks in front of Jesus as he comes rides into town.

He's the king.

And the disciples say out loud what everyone else has been afraid to say,
"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven."

The disciples are singing a portion of Psalm 118.
It is a song of deliverance, a peace Psalm, if you will.
But, like most peace songs, this song also provokes anxiety.

Last week we talked about why the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus.
Basically, they were afraid.
They were afraid Jesus would do something like this, and the Roman authorities would destroy their country.

Now it has happened.
Their worst fears have come to fruition.

In an effort to get things under control, anxious religious leaders come to Jesus and say,

"Teacher, order your disciples to stop."

But, Jesus does not tell them to stop.
Instead he says,

"If my disciples were silent, the stones would shout out."

The king is coming into Jerusalem.
And no one is going to stop him.

NO ORDINARY KING

But, the disciples and the religious leaders miss an important point.

Jesus is not an ordinary king.
His kingdom is not of this world.

His kingdom is not based upon the power of the sword. His kingdom is based upon the power of God's Word, a Word of peace.

What was it the prophet said about the king that comes? This king is humble.
That's why he rides a young donkey.

Note the contrast.
Jesus is a king, but he's a humble king.

How many people associate humility with royalty?
Not many.

In fact we believe that if a person is to be in charge, he has to be strong.

We're willing to overlook a lot of character flaws if we think someone can get the job done.

The world tells us that nice guys finish last.
And we don't want to finish last.
We want to win.

Right?

But, Jesus will redefine what it means to be a winner. Jesus will reveal the power of humility.
He is the king who comes riding on a little donkey.

The religious leaders knew the words of the prophet.
They knew the Hebrew Scriptures by heart.

But, they couldn't accept what they knew.
Their view of Scripture was distorted by their fear.
They could not recognize the power of humility.

And so they ask Jesus to quiet his disciples.

But, Jesus won't do it.
He said that even if they were quiet the stones would cry out.

Of course we know that eventually the voices of the disciples will fall silent.
In the face of the cross, they will go into hiding.
And the stones will cry out.

In particular, a stone rolled across the grave of Jesus will cry out.

And what will that stone say?
"He is not here. He is risen."

But, we get ahead of ourselves.
That's next week's story.
For now the final conflict looms.

A PROPHET

As his disciples cheer, Jesus looks over Jerusalem.
And he weeps.

There's a reason for his tears.
He foresees the destruction of the Holy City.

Their rejection of the King of kings will lead to the very thing they fear the most.

If only they had recognized the things that made for peace, the story could have been different.
(Luke 19:41-44)

Yes, Jesus is king.
But, he is not the king they expected.
He is the King of peace.

Jesus will later tell his disciples to put their swords away even as the enemy approaches.

Why? Those who take up the sword will die by the sword. (Matthew 26:52)

The disciples do not lack for courage.

But, they do (at least at this point) lack understanding.

In the beginning of the Book of Acts (Luke's second volume, the story of how the church came to be) we learn that even after the resurrection, Jesus' disciples still do not understand the true nature of the kingdom.

Jesus is about to ascend into heaven and what do the disciples say, "Lord, is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

In other words is now the time that we take on the Romans and bring in the new regime?

Jesus said, "Wait for the coming of the Spirit."

It will take the coming of the Spirit, before the disciples finally understand the true nature of the Kingdom of God.

But, we shouldn't be too smug in our criticism of the disciples. We too are inclined to define the Kingdom in terms of winning.

There are books cluttering up the religion section of the bookstore that proclaim this very thing right now.

"Follow Jesus and you'll win so much you'll get tired of winning." Right?

Oh wait, that's not the Bible. That's someone else.

The Bible tells us about a Savior who is indeed a King. In fact, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

But, he is humble.

He comes riding on a young donkey.

And as the disciples cheer, his eyes are red and moist.

He sees more than most.

He is a prophet as well as a king.
And what he sees is people who destroy themselves because they rely upon the sword instead of the Savior.

And so Jesus rides on into the city of Jerusalem.

He is their true King.
And he knows the tragedy that's coming, for his people and for himself.

A PRIEST

But, the Bible tells us that Jesus is more than just a king and a prophet.

He is also a priest.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Instead of trying to kill his enemies he will die forgiving his enemies.

He will die on a cross with a placard above his head which reads,

“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Pilate thought it to be a great joke, but as it turns out the joke is on him.

Pilate unwittingly tells the truth for a change.

Another miracle.
A politician tells the truth!

And in the silence of the graveyard, the stones cry out and are rolled away.

William Barclay in his book, *The Mind of Christ*, summarized the ride into Jerusalem this way,

"Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was an action of supreme courage;

it was an assertion of royalty and an offer of love;
it was one and at the same time royalty's claim and love's appeal."

PEACE AND CONFLICT

I wonder.

If Jesus were to ride into our city, would we recognize him as our king?

Would we understand his ride as an offer of love?

Or would we tell his disciples to be quiet,
that all their talk about peace is disturbing the peace?

Maybe we would even crucify him.
All this talk of peace can be dangerous, even subversive.

Tom Mullen is a member of the Society of Friends, otherwise known as the Quakers. He wrote of his denomination,

“They work for peace—and if you really want to cause conflict, work for peace.”

The Quakers have consistently promoted social justice and peace in the face of a world that wants something else. And this has brought them into conflict with the world.

Tell people to put away their swords or their guns, and there will be conflict.

Working for peace is not always a peaceful endeavor.

That’s why the cross stands at the center of our faith.

They crucified this humble and peaceful king.
They crucified him for daring to speak a word of hope and peace in the middle of a broken and violent world.

But, Jesus never wavered in his message.
He still brought his message of peace right into the heart of the city.

And we are called to do the same thing.

Scottish theologian George MacLeod wrote,

“I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the market-place as well as the steeple of the church ...

Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles,

but on a cross between two thieves:
on the town garbage heap:

on a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and Greek and Latin:

at a kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble.” (The Whirlwind, p. 261)

In other words, the message of the cross is a message of challenge to the powers that be ... back then and today.

We too are called to speak truth to power, to talk about those things that make for peace.

We too are called to raise the cross in the marketplace.

We don't do it because we want to cause trouble.
We do it out of love.

We don't want the city to be destroyed.
We don't want the things that make us great to be forgotten.

We want peace.
We want to follow the humble king of peace as he comes into our city.

PEACE AND FEAR

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem he said that the things that made for peace were “hidden from their eyes.”

I wonder.
What are the things that make for peace in our world?

And are those things hidden from our eyes?

I remember something else that Jesus said about peace.

In his farewell address to his disciples as recorded in John's gospel he said,

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

That's the key, fear.

If we are afraid we will tell the messengers of peace to be quiet.

If our hearts are troubled, the message of peace will be distorted.

On the cross Jesus acknowledged this problem.
He prayed,

"Father, forgive them for they *do not know* what they are doing."

They did not know what they were doing.
And often we do not know what we are doing.

This ignorance that afflicts us is not an ignorance of the mind but an ignorance of the heart.

But, through the power of the Spirit our hearts can be changed.

The peace of God in Christ can reveal what is hidden.

Even the most timid disciple can find the courage to march with Jesus into the city.

And we can proclaim the message of the angels:
"Peace on earth."

Who would dare to say such a thing like that in a world like ours?

Jesus did.
And we follow Jesus.

We dare to sing with the disciples of old:

Peace on earth ...

And peace in heaven ...

Prepare the way.

The King of peace is coming.

Amen.