

LUKE 19:28-40

Jesus was on his way up to Jerusalem. When he had come near to 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 the colt?" 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 answered, "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, shouting: *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." Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the

stones would shout out.”

THE INVITATION

Psalm 118:1-2; 14-19
Luke 19:28-40

There is a lot going on in Jerusalem. The city was swelled with Jewish pilgrims who had journeyed for the Passover festival from the entire region. In the meantime, the Romans were preparing for their annual parade slated, not coincidentally, for the same week in which they intentionally demonstrated their military might. The soldiers were clad in their breast coats and helmets, carrying spears and shields while riding huge white stallions. It was all designed to intimidate any Jews who were contemplating a Passover rebellion against Rome’s authoritarian rule. The message was clear: Don’t mess with us! And to add an exclamation point, they sent garrisons to religious sites where an insurrection might germinate. It was something to see as they descended upon Jerusalem from the eastern corridor with banners flying in the wind.

It was above the western side of the city at the Mount of Olives where Jesus and his disciples were gathering together the pilgrims for a parade of their own with a very different message—love, gratitude and peace.

Rather than intimidating, it was meant to be Inviting.

While there was cheering and handwaving by spectators lining the streets for both parades, the enthusiasm was underlaid by fear. Everyone was afraid of someone. While the Jewish leadership did not fear Rome because they were in concert with them, they were afraid of Jesus! He had been making their lives miserable with his populist message leading his followers to proclaim him as the messiah. Jesus' supporters very much feared Roman suppression; and the Romans feared them right back. Otherwise, why the military parade? Put it all together and you can witness the confluence of energies making the situation extremely volatile.

While Jesus' parade itself was celebratory, there was that undercurrent of fear beneath all the shouting. The Romans were very dangerous, ruling with an iron hand and suppressing any expression of dissent. It was like any dictatorship in the history of the world. Those who dare to protest the actions of Vladimir Putin are immediately imprisoned and sometimes tortured and killed. It's the authoritarian playbook.

Look then again at the descent into Jerusalem and its meaning. Luke's version of the event omits significant details provided by Mark, specifically the cries of "Hosanna" and the spreading of palm leaves in the

road as the parade proceeded. “Hosanna” in the biblical Hebrew literally means, *I beg you to save us*. Jesus’ reputation for miracles and healings convinced them that finally...**finally** God had sent them a savior and they were unabashedly proclaiming it: *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, shouting: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!* This was chanted as a song of praise in recognition of Jesus’ lordship.

Yes, behind it there was fear, but it was all being pushed aside for the moment by hope. Palm branches signified victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. And that certainly caught the attention of the Pharisees who were highly annoyed by the “lordship” designation and angrily commanded Jesus to *order his disciples to stop*—which led to Jesus’ powerful retort: *I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out*. So then they descended to Jerusalem while the _Roman army entered the city from the opposite direction. Confrontation was inevitable—good versus evil; love versus hate; freedom versus oppression; fear versus hope; war versus peace; the power of God versus the power of man.

There is nothing like this going on in our twenty-first century world. We all get along; the world is at peace; we may have differences of opinion

but we work at resolving them; we compromise; we have cooperated as an international community to get climate change under control; we give respect to all people regardless of gender, color of skin or nationality. How we have evolved in two thousand years! (Let me get my tongue out my cheek before I bite it off!)

I will say this: if Putin believed the West was weak and would capitulate to his long-held dream of annexing Ukraine and beginning to restore the Soviet empire, he badly miscalculated and instead has served to unify the great majority of the world against him. But on the other hand, in our own country, we are at each other's throats. A recent poll revealed that 85% of Democrats believe the Republican party has been taken over by racists and 84% of Republicans believe the Democratic party is dominated by liberal socialists. And 50% of those in both parties believe another civil war is inevitable. We are not only afraid of each other; we also hate each other.

Like those in the Palm Sunday procession, our real desire is for peace. We not only want peace in Ukraine, we want it in the United States of America. We live in fear of each other. It unsettles us and causes us to regard our neighbors who fall on the other side of the political divide with contempt. So, while we do not have a shooting civil war right now, we are

engaged in a cultural civil war of words and sneers.

And it isn't just peace we that desire "out there", we also want it "in here." Then let's understand that Palm Sunday is an Invitation. We are beckoned to join in the parade which proclaims the powerful deeds of God; the spirit of Christ expressed by residents of Poland, Moldova and other neighbors of Ukraine taking refugees into their homes providing shelter, food and hope. If we want peace inside, we have to practice peace on the outside. In any act of love, we not only bring peace to ourselves, we spread it to others; who spread it to still others. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. So let's accept his Invitation and get into the parade shouting with gratitude: *Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!*

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