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Luke 19:28-44
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Why Are You Untying It?

Our scripture story today paints Jesus, as the head of our Church, and one who was not the least bit interested in either playing politics or religion. Of anyone who could have called in the heavenly host of angels to kick the Roman occupiers to the curb and restore Israel, it would have been Jesus. And yet, we see today that Jesus chose a different approach. He came not to conquer Rome but to conquer our separation from God.

To give a little background. It was the Jewish Passover. One the biggest and most important celebrations of the Jewish faith. Jews would have traveled from all over the region to celebrate how God had delivered them from Egyptian slavery and brought them into the Promised Land. Jerusalem would have been overflowing with pilgrims who came to worship, eat, drink and be merry.

It would have been a scene that also would have made the Roman authorities extremely nervous, requiring extra military presence to maintain the peace.

We will be reading the story of Jesus' final entrance into Jerusalem from Luke 19:28-44 which can also be found in all four gospels.

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. **29** As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, **30** “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.

33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.

36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it **42** and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. **43** The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. **44** They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

There are a couple of things that I want to lift up as we consider this very familiar text. First what was the significance of the colt which no one had ever ridden? Second, what were the Jewish people’s expectation for the Messiah and what did Jesus actually do as Messiah? Third how did people respond? Fourth, what was behind Jesus’ display of emotion as he approached Jerusalem? And finally how might this text inform us today?

So what was the significance of the colt on which no one had ever ridden? As I mentioned earlier, this story is in each of the other gospels. What Luke doesn’t tell us here that the others do is that the colt was that of a donkey.

Typically when military leaders rode into town on a conquest, they would ride a war stallion as a display of power and strength. After the conquest, they might ride back into town on a donkey indicating that the war was over as a symbol of humility and peace.

Jesus riding into town on a donkey would have shown the people that he wasn’t interested in bringing war with the Romans, but instead peace to humankind.

But why one that had never been ridden?

One commentator suggested that an unriden donkey would have been unbroken. Wild. Untamed. It would not have been compliant with putting cloaks on it and then being ridden into town amidst a crowd waving palm branches. The fact that Jesus rode it showed that he had command of all things, even an unwilling beast.

This also fulfilled the prophecy by Zechariah written some five hundred years earlier.

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughters of Jerusalem!

See, your king some to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”¹

¹ Zechariah 9:9

Riding into Jerusalem on the colt would have sent a message that the battle had been won and the war was over. Jesus was bringing peace, not war. But was it humility and peace that the Jewish people expected in their Messiah?

According to one Jewish website, Judaism 101, "The mashiach [or messiah] will be a great political leader descended from King David ([Jeremiah 23:5](#)). The mashiach is often referred to as "mashiach ben David" (mashiach, son of David). He will be well-versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments ([Isaiah 11:2-5](#)). He will be a charismatic leader, inspiring others to follow his example. He will be a great military leader, who will win battles for [Israel](#). He will be a great judge, who makes righteous decisions ([Jeremiah 33:15](#)). But above all, he will be a human being, not a god, demi-god or other supernatural being."²

Furthermore the Prophet Isaiah foretold that "the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."³

See. Strong. Wise. Decisive. Authoritative. Royal. Just. Righteous. Human.

Just like our American presidents! Maybe?

The people saw some of these characteristics in Jesus during his public ministry.

When he turned water into wine.

When he preached good news to the poor.

When he healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and made the lame walk.

When he raised the dead to life.

When he calmed the wind and waves.

When he taught the scriptures as one who knew God personally and not just of God.

When he corrected the religious leaders and teachers of the law on their misunderstanding of the Torah.

When he spoke about loving one's enemies and praying for those who persecute us.

When he challenged their notions of justice with what God actually desired of humans...to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

These were all signs that the Messiah's reign had come and Jesus was their man!

² <https://www.jewfaq.org/mashiach>

³Isaiah 9:6-7

Except Jesus wasn't a great politician or military leader.

Remember he rode into Jerusalem on a peace loving donkey, not a powerful war stallion.

In fact the one time one of his followers used a sword to attack a Roman guard who came to arrest Jesus, Jesus chastised him and told him to put it away...saying "Those who live by the sword, will die by the sword." Hardly the words of a war hero.

So how did the people respond?

I think they were hopeful that Jesus was their Messiah.

Jews on that day would have known Zechariah's prophecy which led them to say "Hosanna to the Son of David" and "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." Essentially the people were proclaiming Jesus to be their Messianic king as they threw their cloaks down on the ground before Jesus as he road on. This was yet another act of royal homage.

The Pharisees thought the people were speaking blasphemy. So they said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." Essentially tell them to be quiet.

They were also waving palm branches which were symbolic in Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures. Not only were they associated with the festival of tabernacles, but they were also longstanding symbol of victory. One commentator wrote, "Together with the myrtle, willow and citron, they formed the lulab an object rabbis tell us was shaken at the recitation of Psalm 118:25: 'O Lord, save us!' or in Hebrew, 'Hosanna!'"⁴

So for all intents and purposes, while Jesus wasn't the picture perfect Messiah that the Jews expected, he was the Messiah that we all needed.

Next, let's look at the display of Jesus' emotion as he approached Jerusalem? Verse 41 tells us that "As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it." The Greek word for wept used here is derived from the root word klaio. It means to weep out loud. Not silently, but loudly. To sob. We get the sense that Jesus was absolutely heartbroken that these same people who were singing his praises, by the end of the week would be saying "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The people he had come to save just didn't get Jesus.

My friends, do we get Jesus this morning?

Jesus said, "If you, even you, had only know on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes."

This makes me wonder, what are we missing today that is right before our eyes that we know would bring us peace - but for some reason is hidden from us?

These are the questions that Palm Sunday brings.

⁴ *NIV Archeological Study Bible*, "Palm Branches in Israel." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 2056.

I wonder if Jesus would weep in this same way today over what is taking place in Israel and Palestine. If only Israel and Hamas would understand what would truly bring them peace.

And finally we ask how does this story inform us today?

The most important thing that we take away from this story is learning who or what can save us. We hear how the people cried out “Hosanna! Son of David! Help us! Save us!” They actually called this right on. Human leaders cannot save us! Our bank accounts cannot save us! Our healthcare system cannot save us! Our educations cannot save us! Neither will our American ways. Nothing and no one can save us but Jesus. And if anyone and anything ever claims that they can save us or our nation, they are lying through their teeth. Only King Jesus can do that. Remember, the government rest on Jesus’ shoulders, not any other’s.

Praise God!

In just a moment we are going to invite the Krane family to come forward for Esther’s baptism. I love that Josh and Heather chose to have each of their children baptized on this day. Because it stands in stark contrast to the power systems of our world. It tells everyone that on this day, they choose to bow to King Jesus as Lord. That they are called to be citizens of a heavenly kingdom and not an earthly one.

Jesus alone can save us from our sins. Jesus alone leads us triumphal before God. Jesus alone is worthy of our praise.

Let us pray.