

Postures: Praise

Luke 19: 28-40

Good Morning Church Family,

It's so good to be together again with all of you this morning. I missed you all last week. I especially want to welcome those of you who are joining us online this morning.

Today is Palm Sunday, we are one week away from Easter. Today marks the beginning of what is known in many Christian traditions as Holy Week- the seven days leading up to Easter. In the story of Jesus, there's so much that happens in the next seven days, and I invite you to think of this morning as the entrance, the gateway if you will into Easter. Just as Jesus is entering Jerusalem into a week that will be filled with darkness and light, despair and hope, so too are we entering a week that can be rich with meaning and promise as we walk in the footsteps of our Lord. Let's enter in together.

In the scripture that Char read for us this morning, Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem. When they got near the Mount of Olives, which was somewhere between three and five kilometers away from Jerusalem. Jesus says to two of the disciples, "okay, you're going to go ahead of the rest of us into the city. Just as you enter it, you're going to see a young colt, a young donkey, who has never been ridden before, tied to a post. You're going to bring it back here to me. If anybody says to you, "What

are you doing? Where are you taking the donkey?" then you just tell them, "The Lord needs it." Now if I were in the disciples shoes, I'd feel a little hesitant about this plan. I wouldn't feel like the Lord had given me a very ironclad response to taking someone else's livestock, but the disciples do as Jesus asks them and it happens exactly as Jesus said it would. They find the donkey. When they untie it, someone asks, "Why are you uniting the donkey?" and the disciples reply, the Lord needs it. This is the first thing that we should pay attention together this morning, Jesus says something will happen, and it happens, exactly as he said it would.

Once the disciples bring the donkey back, they pile their cloaks on the back of the donkey (to make both the donkey and Jesus comfortable, and they help Jesus climb on. Jesus begins riding the donkey down into Jerusalem, his disciples walking along side, filled with praise. They've been waiting for this: after all this teaching, healing and ministering around the region their heading back to Jerusalem. Jesus may have predicted his own death, and maybe that's the back of their minds, maybe they've chalked it up another metaphor, another teaching of Jesus, because that couldn't be about right now. Something wonderful and victorious is happening. And the feeling only builds as more and more people come to roadside through Jerusalem and begin through their throwing cloaks on the group, laying out a "red carpet" of sorts for Jesus, their King! The scripture says the whole multitude of the disciples, so that's really all those in the crowd who love Jesus began to shout, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" "Hosanna!" Verse 37 in my NRSV describes the scene this way, "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. That’s such an interesting turn of the phrase - the deeds of power. And that’s the second thing to take note of in our scripture: this juxtaposition of power and peace. Here’s Jesus, riding down the mountain the most innocuous of animals. This King is not coming to show the spoils of war, rather this King is returning to this place from healing the sick, giving sight to the blind and making the lame walk. It’s power to be sure, but it’s a very different kind of power.

In the last two verses of our scripture this morning, the Pharisees are also witness to this parade and they are bothered. This is too much Jesus! Calling you the coming king. Throwing their cloaks on the ground; it’s showy. It’s too much. Carrying on this with a grand procession before the eyes of all the Romans. And they approach him, as the donkey ambles through the village and they say to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop. Call this off! Now!” Jesus turns to them and says, “I tell you, if these people were silent, the stones would shout out.” I imagine the Pharisees standing there, a little slack jawed. This Jesus, this processional, and most the Lord God whose name he comes in is to praise worthy, is so deserving of all the honour and more that is being shown that day that Creation itself would cry out -Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. This song of praise cannot be kept silent, even if all the crowd was suddenly rendered mute.

This is bold statement to end our scripture reading on for Palm Sunday, “If tell you, if these people were silent, even the rocks would shout out!” The author, Luke, is making

the point to his readers, including us, that Jesus is worthy of all our praise. That is Jesus is not only a prophet, but God in the flesh, filled with power, peace. This week at our kids club on Tuesday, we talked about the story of the Prophet Samuel anointing the young David to be the King of Israel sometime. Jesse, David's Father, offers each of his handsome older son's to Samuel. And each time, Samuel says, "No, this is not the one the lord has chosen. People judge by the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at one's heart." So, for our craft at kids club, they all made and decorated heart shaped glasses, to remind them to look at the hearts of others, not just their appearance. I think Luke is asking his readers to do something similar with this Story of the triumphal entry, this Jesus is worthy of our praise, and if we keep those "glasses" on as we look at this story, we can see the ways in which Jesus is praiseworthy in this text, and then we can apply that same vision to the rest of the story of Holy Week.

Why would Luke land on "The rocks would cry out.". It's this metaphor that praising Jesus is completely irresistible, even these pieces of stone long to praise Jesus. At the beginning of this passage, we find this relatively detailed section about the donkey. Jesus tells the disciples where the donkey is, and what they do, and what they should say. And the next verses, basically tell that whole thing over again when the disciples get the donkey. In my sermon last Sunday, I mentioned that I learned in my preaching class, that in scripture everything is there for a reason. Because of the amount of time and effort that is involved in writing something down in biblical times, everything is there on purpose, there are no superfluous details. So, why include this relatively long detailed account of getting the donkey? The answer, I think, is because this is a great

way of illustrating that what Jesus says will happen will happen. Jesus speaks with authority- even about the most banal things, like getting a donkey.

In the Gospel story, the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem on the back of a donkey ushers in a very big week. I realize that's an understatement. Jesus has spent the last three years doing ministry as, he said, in Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus has spent three years doing that, revealing the people what the heart of God really is, that the heart of God is true and trustworthy. This sense of things building towards his arrival in Jerusalem is real and Luke is telling his readers, everything they have heard and read up to this point is true; all of Jesus is true and we can offer praise for that.

So, in this story, what is Luke showing us about the praise worthiness of Jesus? Why should I approach Jesus this morning with a posture of praise?

First, Luke is showing us that Jesus is worthy of praise because what Jesus says is

going to happen does happen. Jesus is trustworthy. I think that's precisely the point that Luke is illustrating with his very detailed account of disciples getting a donkey. This Jesus knows what is going to happen! This Jesus is dependable. If Jesus can predict the most banal interaction about collecting a donkey, then everything that Jesus has predicted up until this point is also going to happen: his violent death; his coming resurrection. Further still, if Jesus is trustworthy, then so is God. This is not a God who is fickle, who negates his promises, who cannot be trusted. Luke is saying to us, trust what Jesus has to say.

Secondly, Jesus comes in both power and peace, in equal measure. There's been a lot of talk in the news lately about power. About Putin's shameful use of power, about who has the power to put a stop to this, about the power of resistance. When people discuss power, it seems to be about the ability to control other people, to make one's aims happen by sheer force of will. Not exactly the first word that comes to mind when you see an early 30's Jewish Rabbi riding down a hillside on the back of a donkey. So it's striking that in verse 37 we read, "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." For all the deeds of Power, they had seen."

The deeds of power that Jesus performed look nothing like anything the disciples had ever known. This man who raised the dead. Cast out demons. Called the little children. Did the disciples hope that Jesus would still offer them the power they longed for, the

overthrowing of Rome? Almost certainly. Probably most of us in their shoes would have felt the same. But there was no denying that this power, this authority that Jesus showed was quite unlike they had ever seen before. Jesus' power came through the way of peace. The way of being a servant. The way of sacrifice. One of my professors in college would often remind his students that "Absolute power corrupts absolutely". Yet, Jesus is the exception to that rule. Jesus, God in the flesh, who held absolute power chose to divest himself of power for the good of others. It was unfathomable to the disciples, and, on some days, it's unfathomable to me too. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem foreshadows this tension of power and peace that will be on display during holy week.

Thirdly, Jesus, over the course of the coming week will be ushering in a new Kingdom, and our story for this morning offers us a peek behind the curtain of the upside-down-ness of it. A kingdom where the king of glory, the son of God, rides a donkey through a crowd of people. A kingdom where any person, who wants to dash out of their houses and come to the roadside and shout Hosanna are welcome! The ever wise and poetic Rachel Held Evans says it this way, "The kingdom, Jesus taught, is right here--present yet hidden, immanent yet transcendent. It is at hand--among us and beyond us, now and not-yet. The kingdom of heaven, he said, belongs to the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful, and those who hunger and thirst for God. It advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility. In this kingdom, many who are last will be first and many who are first will be last. The rich don't usually get it, Jesus said, but children always do. This is a kingdom

whose savior arrives not on a warhorse, but a donkey, not through triumph and conquest, but through death and resurrection. This kingdom is the only kingdom that will last.””

So Friends, as we enter Holy Week, as we witness our Lord approaching the cross, how can dip down in the well of deep meaning that is offered to us this week? My invitation to you would be to read through the story of Holy Week this week. Perhaps at big each day; so that you're reading the last supper on Thursday, the crucifixion on Friday and so on. There's lots of helpful guides online for doing that. Read the story with the question of, what am I being called to praise Jesus for and about in this passage? Could I say “blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord” with each part of the story? Why or why not? Does it feel like peace or power is winning? What glimpses of the new kingdom am I being offered?

In closing, on this Palm Sunday, I offer to you the same prayer that Paul offered the church at Ephesus, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power

that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”