

The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:35-44

Then they brought the colt 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
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.”

The story this week is printed as a sound map that indicates the phrases and sentences of the story. This arrangement of the story makes it easier to learn. You might want to try learning a larger part of this story by heart. If you do, it helps to stand up and move around as you tell the story.

Luke’s story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is a bittersweet story. It combines the celebration of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem with his weeping over the city in recognition of the consequences for the city of its rejection of him and his way.

The background of the story is the earlier stories of triumphal celebrations. Probably the most memorable was David’s triumphal procession bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem when Jerusalem had just been established as the capital of Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 6). The ark of the Lord was brought into the city with singing and dancing.

The other story of celebration was the coronation of Jehu. Jehu was anointed by a disciple of Elisha and acclaimed as king with the mandate to punish Ahab and his house including Ahab's wife, Jezebel. The conclusion of this story reflects the same tradition as the triumphal entry of Jesus:

When Jehu came back to his master's officers, they said to him, "Is everything all right? Why did that madman come to you?" He answered them, "You know the sort and how they babble." They said, "Liar! Come on, tell us!" So he said, "This is just what he said to me: 'Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.'" Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king." (2 Kings 9.11-13)

Just as they spread their cloaks before Jehu when he was anointed as king, so also the community of the disciples spread their cloaks before Jesus as he rode into the city. Of course his riding into the city on a donkey rather than a horse, as was the custom of the kings of the ancient near east, was symbolically significant. Generals and other men of power rode horses; poor people and women rode donkeys. The preceding story of the acquisition of the "colt" (Luke 19:29-34), which in this context refers to a young male ass, calls attention to this fact. It also reestablishes that Jesus was a prophet who could foresee the colt that would be there, as well as the response of the bystanders. Thus, Jesus enters the city as both a "humble" king and a prophet.

The part of the story that we are learning this week is the acclamation of the disciples (in bold): *As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully 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!" (NRSV)***

The NRSV translation of "the multitude of the disciples" is misleading in its implication that this was a throng or great crowd of hundreds of disciples. The meaning of the Greek word here is more accurately translated as "the community" or "group" of the disciples. It may imply that it was a few more than "the twelve" but Luke is clearly referring to those who had traveled with him and had witnessed the many "deeds of power" that Jesus had done.

The distinctive element of Luke's story of Jesus' entry is the explicit motif of peace. This occurs first in the acclamation of the disciples. They celebrated Jesus as a person of power, but his power was the power of healing, teaching, control of evil spirits, and authority over natural events such as storms rather than military power. They acclaim and bless Jesus as a king who comes in the name of the god of Israel, "the Lord." The fact that Jesus is not coming into the city to overthrow the Romans and establish a Jewish state will only become clear later in the story. However, the character of Jesus' kingdom has been implied through his "deeds of power" earlier in the Gospel.

The characteristic quality of Jesus' reign is peace. The phrase, "Peace in heaven" as an acclamation presumes the apocalyptic worldview of the first century. Apocalyptic was based on the assumption that events on the earth such as the rise and fall of particular nations is determined by what happens in the relationships of spiritual powers in the heavens. For example, if Israel wins a victory on the earth, it is because Israel's angel, Michael, has won a victory in the ongoing struggles between the powers of good and evil in the heavens. This same worldview is reflected in the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds and the angelic choir's hymn of celebration:

I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. . .
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace. . .!' (Luke 2.13-14)

The disciples' joyous acclamation at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem echoes the acclamation of the angels at Jesus' birth. The birth of the Messiah is first celebrated in the heavens. That celebration will spill over on the earth. Just as the angels proclaimed peace and glory in the highest heaven at Jesus' birth, so also at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the community of the disciples proclaim: "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven."

This does not mean that they are celebrating or hoping for an event in heaven that will have no impact on the earth. It is instead that the establishment of peace in heaven will mean the establishment of peace on earth. This worldview is a metaphorical way of describing the impact of spiritual power. The disciples celebrate the fact that the establishment of a kingdom/government controlled by Jesus' spirit of peace and love will lead to peace on earth.

Jesus' weeping over the city as he enters is an expression of his grief at the recognition of what will happen to the city in the future. His wish is that the people of the city would recognize and believe in the things he is bringing that will lead to peace: love of friends and enemies, forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity. But they cannot see it. And as a result, Jesus foresees a disaster of destruction will come upon the city.

And for Luke's listeners who hear this story in the '80's, this has already happened in the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 A.D., ten to twenty years before they are hearing the Gospel story. That is, Luke's listeners can confirm Jesus' prophetic recognition that the failure to learn the ways of peace in his time in the '30's will lead to the tragic conclusion of the Jewish revolt and war in 66-70 A.D. The reason why this disaster happened is that the people then did not recognize the time when God came to them and showed them a way to peace in the life and ministry of Jesus.

The same bittersweet message is still equally true for the world now nearly 2000 years after Luke composed his Gospel. Like ancient Jerusalem and the people of ancient Israel, the human community now including the nations of the United States and Israel, have not recognized the things that make for peace. Jesus' way of non-violence, love, and reconciliation between enemies is neither recognized nor honored by the nations of the world. And the ongoing history of incredibly destructive wars continues to march through the communities of the human family. Until we take Jesus more seriously as a human community and begin to learn the things that make for peace, one can only foresee a continuation of this cycle of warfare and destruction.

It is a good idea for us to learn the disciples' acclamation of Jesus and his government in the world and to take it to heart. Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that has been established "in heaven" and continues to shape the future. It is our best hope for the future. We need to learn to recognize and establish the things that will lead to peace.

Suggestions for discipleship formation this week—you might do a different exercise each day.

You might:

- ❖ Read Luke 19.35-44 through out loud once, and then read Luke 19.38 three times. Each time read it with a different volume, speed or tone of voice. Then see if you can say any of it by heart. Notice which parts you remember and which you forget. Here's the verse:

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

- ❖ Pray for the "Anchored in Peace" churches and their efforts to witness to Jesus' way in northwest Dayton.
- ❖ Imagine the triumphal entry of Jesus and get a feel of what it was like for the disciples to shout these words in "the big city." If you took seriously Jesus' way of peace as still valid in 2010, what would you shout? Draw yourself in the box below (stick figures are fine) and write your shout in a conversation bubble:

