

Luke 19:28-40

It's probably just me, but when it comes to Palm Sunday I've noticed a disconnect between history and meaning. Since forever for most of us, we've known what happened on Palm Sunday. We've known that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. We've all seen in our mind's eye the palm branches cut off trees and cloaks thrown off shoulders that make their way onto Jesus' path. We know about the hosannas and all that good stuff. We know it. We believe it. We even go to all the work to reenact it every year. The trouble is that we're not sure what Palm Sunday is broadcasting to us today.

Contrast the Boston Tea Party with that (I'm not talking about the modern political party. I'm talking about the event in American history.). We don't sit around and celebrate how a bunch of patriots turned Boston Harbor into a giant teakettle. We could care less about that. We understand it as an act of defiance, a brewing of rebellion you might say. It was a bunch of Americans shoving England's tax in their face saying, "Go ahead and try to tax us without representation. We're not going to put up with it." We understand it's place and it's timing in helping launch what we call the American Revolution. That's the Boston Tea Party.

Back to Palm Sunday. We know the history, but what exactly did it launch? What exactly is it saying in the grand scheme of things? Those are the questions that we need to answer so that we can celebrate Palm Sunday with all the importance and joy that it deserves. Keep those questions in your mind as you listen to part of Luke's account of Palm Sunday.

And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works 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!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

The difficulty in figuring out Palm Sunday for ourselves is that nobody in the original history seemed to know what it was launching or what it was saying either. You get the picture that all of a sudden the disciples were grinning; waving like beauty queens; and wishing they had cleaned up a little bit better before this impromptu parade. You get the idea that all these people on a journey to Jerusalem were ready for this distraction. After all, they had a little time on their hands during their extended stay at Jerusalem. And so families make their way to see what all the shenanigans were about. "Hey, did you hear that the guy who brought that other guy, Lazarus I think, back to life is coming this way?" And they all join in the hysteria

of the moment. People at the Boston Tea Party knew exactly what they were doing and why they were doing it. Nobody here did. They were caught in a tide of God's history.

What stands out on Palm Sunday is Jesus. He's calling the shots every step of the way. "You two guys, go get the colt in Bethphage." There are no questions from the disciples. Nothing like, "Uh, Jesus, are you sure there's a colt there and don't you think that'll get us in trouble for up and taking some guy's colt?" There are no questions. The disciples had learned by now just to execute orders and not ask. Sure enough when they took the foal somebody asked, "Uh, guys, why are you taking my colt?" And they responded exactly as instructed, "The Lord needs it." Like that was somehow enough information and now the owner should understand why they were taking the colt off to who knows where or when or if he'd ever get the colt back. But like Jedi knights with mind control, the answer of the two disciples was enough and they made off with the never ridden colt. That was that. Jesus was calling the shots so that things happened just so for his parade.

Which is so strange. Because from the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus fought that. He told his mom, "Woman, my time has not yet come." He told Peter, "Don't breathe a word about me being the Christ." After the Transfiguration, we're told that Jesus said, "Don't leak what happened to anybody right now." Jesus basically spent his entire ministry keeping a tight rein on how and what leaked out to the people about who he was and what he was doing. It was a timing issue. He didn't want people getting too out of control about him until the time was right, which was now. But it was more than just a timing issue. It was an image issue. Jesus, as much as was possible, didn't want people to create an image of who he was based on their projections of personal hopes and dreams. That would just muddy his true identity for them. On this day, he wanted them to see him for who he really was.

And so he preps everything just so. He would come on a holy foal - one not ridden before, one just for him. The foal's mother would come too so everyone could see in the rearview mirror (because we always see 20/20 like that), that this was exactly what Zechariah prophesied about the Messiah's entrance to the city. Not only would they see this in the rearview mirror, they could know it in that moment. Without Facebook or Twitter, word spread like wildfire on that day. It's not hard to guess how. We're told in Mark that people were loitering around the spot where the colt was tied. And we all can guess what they did when they saw what went down with that foal. You can bet they were telling everyone, "The guy from Nazareth is going to ride into the city on an unbroken foal." The message was this to the entire world: Royalty was coming to Jerusalem.

You couldn't miss that message as Jesus rode along. The cloaks were placed on the road. The palm branches came down in front of Jesus' foal. Hosannas were sung and praises were offered. And what's key is that Jesus accepted it. He didn't quiet

the people and say, “No. No. I really don’t deserve this.” Or, “Come on now. I’m really not that big a deal.” Jesus accepted the praise as something due him. In fact, Jesus made sure it continued. It’s almost kind of funny how childish the Pharisees are. They start throwing a fit like a two-year-old might thinking, “They’re following him and not us!” And so they go to Jesus and they say, “Censure these people.” Or as we might say nowadays, “Will you tell them to shut-up?!” Jesus said, **“If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (v. 40)** And let’s be honest. There was no irony in Jesus’ voice on that one. I personally believe that God would have given the rocks voices if he needed to. Because on Palm Sunday the world was to know the King was coming to town and that day he would receive what was his by divine right.

Praise that I owe him. Praise that you owe him too. I’ll tell you what bugs me as I look at that powerful statement from Jesus. Nobody has told me to shut-up about Jesus. Nobody has censured me in my life. Nobody. And yet hours of a day can go by and I’m just whining about my life or feeling tired or worried or anxious about this or that thing; which means that no hosannas go up from the little corner of the world known as Jonathan Bourman. And then contrast that with these people who have little to no clue who Jesus is and what he is about to do, and they are the ones so joyous and unrestrained with their praise of Jesus. It’s so ridiculous, isn’t it? It goes to show how little I care for Jesus; how little he enters my thoughts; how little I value his royalty and sovereignty over everything big or little that happens in my life. If I were King, I would’ve taken the hosanna gig away from me and given it to the rocks long ago. They’d be better at it.

But he’s not that kind of king. That’s the kind of king we’re used to. We get tit for tat. We get fighting for what’s rightfully yours. We get power struggle, punishment, and winning. That’s what’s in us by nature. But it’s not what’s in Jesus, God’s royalty, by nature. He didn’t ride a white stallion into Jerusalem saying, “I am here to win, control, punish, and get what’s rightfully mine.” He rides a foal of a donkey. Melanie and I went to a place called Medieval Times when we were on vacation once so I have this image in my head of how it might look if Jesus rode in a jousting tournament against big, gorgeous horses with his little unbroken donkey in his homely get-up.

Tell me that doesn’t shock you and win you. The King comes on an animal that is only good for times of peace. You can’t fight with it. You can only plow with it. And you only need to plow when there’s true peace in the land. Otherwise, the crops are just going to strengthen your enemy. Zechariah tells us what all this means, **“I will take the chariots away from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations.” (v. 10)** The King comes and he comes in peace. Retire the chariots to the museum. Put the war-horses out to pasture for the rest of their lives. Let the battle bow be an artifact of an age gone by. It’s time for peace. That’s what Jesus, God’s royalty, is saying to

the world by presenting himself in this perfect and calculated way.

That matters to people like you and me. Yes, Jesus would be better off giving the hosanna gig to a quarry of rocks than he would to Trinity Lutheran, but he's not a warmongering King. He's not a tit-for-tat King. He's not a King who is going to fight and demand what's his. He's a King announcing to the world by his entrance into the Jerusalem, "I'm here to end all fighting between God and you. I'm here to make bows artifacts; put chariots in museums; and war horses out to pasture. By the time my work is done, God will have no reason left to come after you as an enemy. There will be true, cosmic, and eternal peace between God and people." And that's Palm Sunday's announcement.

Matthew thought it was integral to his Gospel's history of Jesus. Mark thought it was indispensable to his. Luke just couldn't do without it. Even the last Gospel written, John, includes the now familiar history. Palm Sunday makes all four Gospels. It goes without saying that that is rare. It also makes sense. It is The Moment when Jesus introduces himself to Jerusalem as God's royalty. It's The Moment when Jesus publicly begins to accept all the praise that's his by right. It's The Moment when he unveils his kingly identity - not a projection of what we'd hope he might be or what we'd hope he might do for us. It's The Moment he says, "I'm the King that will create peace. Cosmic peace. For the universe." And that's why we take this moment to celebrate Palm Sunday in our hearts. That's why we take this service to reenact that ancient impromptu parade. That's why we raise the rafters with our hosannas today, throughout Holy Week, and in our lives. Not because we have to. There are rocks for that. We do it because it's the only way to meet and greet a King for what he's done and for who he is. Amen.