

Luke 19:28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Luke 19:29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 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. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 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, 38 saying,

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

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

THE JESUS CHEER

When I was in high school a traveling evangelist led a youth retreat in our area. He began the service by doing what he called the Jesus cheer.

Like a cheerleader at the local high school he began, “Give me a J.” The young crowd responded with a bit of hesitation, “J” “Give me an “E.” The response was louder as the crowd responded, “E.” “Give me an S. Give me a U. Give me an S.”

What does it spell? By this time we were ready to run out onto that field and tackle the devil all by ourselves. We literally roared, “Jesus!”

But, I must admit that even at that young age I was bit disturbed by what we had done. I didn’t know why, but it just didn’t seem right. Jesus and football cheers just didn’t seem to go together.

(Although I must admit that in West Virginia, cheering on the local football team is a religion to many people!)

Anyway, in my mind Palm Sunday must have been a bit like that youth rally.

The disciples were leading cheers for Jesus as he came into Jerusalem. “Give me a J. Give me an E. Give me a SUS.

What does it spell? Jesus!”

THE PARADE OF THE KING

To be technical that isn't exactly what they yelled. In Luke's gospel they yelled, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

And that was even worse.

I usually don't have much sympathy for the Pharisees, but in this case I understood their concern. Every action that is taken in this passage says Jesus is a king.

The colt, the donkey that had never been ridden was what a king would ride for his coronation in a time of peace. The actions of the crowd, throwing their cloaks in front of the beast as Jesus rode into town that was another sign that Jesus was a king.

But, when the disciples and the crowd began to cry out joyfully, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" ... that was too much. That was dangerous.

THE PROBLEM WITH PASSOVER

There was probably another procession earlier that week. Pontius Pilate rode into town on a warhorse. He was surrounded with extra Roman troops. Why? They were approaching the season of Passover, and security needed to be tightened.

Think about why the Jews celebrated Passover.

They were slaves in Egypt. But, God and his messianic figure, Moses led them out of slavery with a display of power and heavenly might.

God literally fought for his people. The angel of death destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians and thus Pharaoh had to let God's people go.

If God did it once, maybe God would do it again. Maybe God would send another Messiah who would set the people free. The Romans hadn't encountered anyone like these crazy Jews before. No matter how hard they put them down; no matter how many of them they crucified the insurrections still continued.

What made the Jews of Jesus' day so hard to conquer?

They were a theocracy. They believed that God was on their side. They believed that it was only a matter of time before God would once again set them free.

It's very hard if not impossible to conquer a people who have this kind of hope. Failed rebellions, false Messiahs and crucifixions were common.

THE PHARISEES OBJECT

But, the Pharisees knew the truth. If the Jews kept rebelling against the mighty Roman army one day there would be a day of reckoning. One day the Romans would burn Jerusalem to the ground and scatter God's people to the four winds. (In fact in 70 AD this very thing happened.)

So, some of the Pharisees came up to Jesus and whispered in his ear, "Jesus, please tell your disciples to stop." But, Jesus wouldn't stop the cheers. In fact Jesus said that if the people stopped cheering, "the stones would shout out."

Even if Jesus had asked them, the people would not stop cheering. Jesus had done many mighty things. He not only said what a Messiah should say; he also did what a Messiah should do.

In fact the mighty deeds of Jesus (like raising a man from the dead) seemed to suggest that it was time for a new Passover. It seemed to all the people that God was on the move again.

Get out of the way Pharisees. We have a new leader. We have a new Messiah, a new king who will lead us out of captivity. And Jesus seems to agree with the crowd. The new Passover was inevitable.

THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

In John's gospel the wild enthusiasm of the crowd is given as the reason that the religious leaders finally decided to crucify Jesus. If Jesus wouldn't tell the people to be quiet, the religious leaders would quiet Jesus.

The religious leaders would have Jesus crucified in order to spare their country from being crucified. Jesus would be their sacrificial lamb.

And so he was a sacrificial lamb ... but not just their sacrificial lamb. He would become everyone's sacrificial lamb.

The crowds were right in a way. Jesus was their king. He would be leading them to a new Passover.

But, it wouldn't happen in the way they thought it would happen. The kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus would turn out to be a lot different from the kingdoms envisioned by Pilate or the Pharisees or even his own disciples.

It wouldn't be a kingdom characterized by soldiers and swords. It wouldn't be a kingdom characterized by religious and political power and intrigue. It wouldn't be a kingdom based upon the idea that God is on our side in the field of battle.

PEACE AND DISSENSION

The kingdom of God would be about peace, God's peace.

This is a unique emphasis in Luke's gospel. You may have noticed that though this is Palm Sunday, in Luke's gospel there are no palms and no "hosannas." Instead, the people say, "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven."

In Luke's gospel the kingdom is not about war. It's about peace. "Peace" is associated with the coming kingdom fourteen times. For example, when Jesus was born the angels sang, "Glory to God in highest, and on earth peace ... " (Luke 2:14)

In Luke's gospel there is an emphasis upon living at peace with God and with each other. God's peace is for everybody. It is for Jews and Gentiles. It is for slaves and free. It is for men and women.

But, that perfect peace is rejected and even causes dissension.

After our lesson for today, Jesus comes near and sees the city of Jerusalem. He weeps over it, and says, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.... you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God" (Luke 19:42, 44b).

In the end everyone, even those who led the Jesus cheer on the road to Jerusalem, will reject Jesus. They cheered for peace, but they did not know the things that make for peace.

This peaceful Messiah came in all humility into Jerusalem on a donkey. Soon he will be met with rejection and violence. No one will cheer him when Good Friday comes.

And it will be left to the stones to cry out his name.
But, come to think of it the stones will cry out.

You remember the story. In Luke we also read that the stone, which the builders rejected, will become the corner stone. (Luke 20:17) And next week we will read that a very big stone speaks volumes when it gets rolled away. (Luke 24:2)

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU CHEER

What does this story mean to us?

It tells us that we need to be careful about how we cheer for Jesus. We can do the Jesus cheer flawlessly and yet not know anything about the things that make for peace, his peace.

Pilate believed he was "keeping the peace" through military might.

The disciples of Jesus believed that they were making a just peace possible by challenging the powers that be. They thought that God was on their side because their cause was just.

The Pharisees on the other hand defined “peace” as the absence of conflict. Their philosophy was “don’t rock the boat.”

All of these philosophies are alive and well in our world today. There are many in our world who think that might makes right and that God is on “our” side. Those who dare to challenge this viewpoint are told by the powers that be, “Be quiet. Don’t cause trouble.”

Jesus suggested another way. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

PEACEMAKING ON A CROSS

Peacemaking according to Jesus involved loving your enemy and doing good to those who persecute you. The power of heaven is found not in curses but in blessing.

Peace, God’s peace is definitely the theme of the kingdom that comes.

And yet, ironically the “peacemakers” are always getting into trouble ... beginning with Jesus. Tom Mullen makes this statement about his denomination, The Quakers, "They work for peace -- and if you really want to cause conflict, work for peace."

You can lead the Jesus cheer all you want. But, if you start talking about what it means to follow Jesus, if you start talking about the things that lead to peace, watch out! You’re on the road to a cross. You’re on the road to sorrow and heartbreak.

Why in the world would you want to take that road?

THE COLT

The clue is found in our lesson for today. The colt, a donkey that has never been ridden is an appropriate steed for Jesus to ride. The fact that the donkey has never been ridden makes it holy. It serves a sacred purpose.

Jesus deliberately chooses a young donkey, a colt for his ride into Jerusalem. His instructions to the disciples were very specific. Jesus told them, "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." Luke 19:30 (NRSV)

According to an Old Testament prophecy in the book of Zechariah (9:9-10), in the future there would be another king who would return from a victory. But, this king would not behave like the kings of old.

Instead of a fist raised in pride, this king would come in humility. Instead of entering

town on a chariot or stallion, this king would ride a lowly donkey.

Instead of shouting “we’re number one” and rubbing salt in the wounds of the vanquished, this king would “command peace to the nations.” This king would reach out with the hand of blessing for all people.

The power of this king would not be in the number of legions under his command. The power of this king would be in the fact that he would be called a prince of peace. His power would be the power of love and friendship.

Something sacred is happening right before their eyes. No one rides a common donkey to war. But, this is no conquering warrior who rides into Jerusalem. This is the King of Peace.

THE KING RIDES TODAY

And today something sacred is happening right before our eyes as well. King Jesus comes riding into our minds and hearts. We know his name. We lead the Jesus cheer with great gusto.

But, remember that he still rides on a donkey. It is not the steed of prestige and power. It is the mount of service and sacrifice.

Do we know this king? Do we know this kingdom of peace?
Peace is the secret ingredient when it comes to God’s kingdom.

Jesus said,
“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

This peace, the Bible tells us, is a peace that passes all our understanding, but it is a peace that nonetheless keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

It is a hope that helps us in our life but it is a hope that goes beyond our life. It is as our passage for today puts it a “heavenly peace.” It is a glory that we cannot fully explain, but when it comes into our lives we know that it is the power of God’s salvation.

Today is a sacred moment of joy and hope. It is right to cheer Jesus and praise God’s name. It is right to enter the sanctuary with Palm branches and music.

But, we must go beyond cheering Jesus to hearing his message. Do we know the things that lead to peace? Do we know ... do we really know the sacred one who enters our world today?

THE CHEER

Ted Wardlaw tells of a Christmas Eve service. It was the 9 AM service held in the chapel of a large downtown church in Atlanta. The people packed the chapel that Christmas Eve, but before they could enter the church they had to pass through a crowd of fifty homeless men.

These men had not made it into the church's night shelter, which was full on this cold night ... so they were huddled together waiting for a bus that would take them to the city's shelter.

Several church members invited them to join the service, but they declined. They couldn't afford to miss their bus.

Ted said that they processed into the chapel and said a corporate prayer of confession, and then had a period of silence. Finally the associate minister said, "Believe the Good News of the Gospel! In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!"

And at that very moment the congregation heard a huge raucous cheer from outside the church. The men who were waiting the arrival of the bus in the cold saw their means of deliverance pull up.

Ted said, "I will never be able to hear those words again without thinking of the only appropriate response to them; riotous cheering throughout the precincts of heaven and earth!"

And that's why we need to cheer Jesus this day. We don't cheer him because he is a military hero. We don't cheer him because he helps us get what we want.

We cheer him because he gives us what we need. He delivers us from the cold, cruel world, and he forgives our sin. He is the King of Peace who rides into our life in the nick of time. He brings us peace, a heavenly peace that changes our life here on earth.

So ... give me a J. Give me an E. Give me an S. Give me a U. Give me an S.

What does it spell? (Jesus)

And Jesus spells salvation and hope and forgiveness. Jesus spells peace, a peace that will one day conquer this world and the next.

God help us understand the things that make for peace. God help us be transformed by the glory of this moment. God help us not only lay down our lips but also our lives for the coming kingdom ... where peace will reign forever and ever.

Amen.