

Luke 19:28-40

The triumphal entry

March 20, 2016 Palm Sunday

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The poet John Leax once said Palm Sunday “seems the strangest holiday of the year, a celebration of misunderstanding.” Fleming Rutledge, the great Episcopal pastor-theologian, calls Palm Sunday *the Trojan Horse of the Christian year*.¹ It begins with the festival atmosphere of children waving their palms and leading the rest of us in singing glad hosannas to our Lord, reenacting the joyful crowd of disciples who lined the dusty road as Jesus entered Jerusalem. Yet, soon enough we are reminded just how quickly glad hosannas turn to the vicious shouts of Good Friday, crucify him! Crucify him! It is precisely this noxious reversal from hosanna to murderous violence that should give us all pause. Evenso, there is no evidence that the crowds who called for his murder were the same as the disciples who joyfully praised him.

Let’s begin with the makeshift parade - the kind children conjure up on a bright spring day, playing in the backyard, lining up after each other, wearing funny hats, blowing kazoos and appointing one of their own a king. What would this parade be without a donkey to carry the triumphant king? A donkey? Seriously? Yes, a donkey shall carry this king. (At least that is what Matthew says, echoing the prophecy of Zechariah.) Then who will find a donkey at this late hour? Why you will, faithful disciples, ever ready to serve. You will find the donkey that will carry our king. So, off you go looking for a donkey to haul into this parade, simply because he said so. That’s all you need to say to the owner whose jaw drops when you start to steal his donkey off the street in broad daylight. Negotiating a donkey so The MESSIAH can ride in glory? Oy vey! This has what’s come too? Okay yes Luke and Mark refer to a **colt** along with the donkey; still it’s not exactly a stallion fit for the world’s version of King.

You might think it’s a joke, only it isn’t. Or maybe it is in the way that only God can tell a joke in the mystery of the world’s redemption.

Some scholars think the two disciples sent out to find the colt were James and John, which is hilarious because only a few days earlier they were asking Jesus to put them in the best seats in house, on the left and right hand when he comes in glory. Now it comes to this: finding a suitable animal for his triumphal entry!

The second misunderstanding has something to do with the entry itself. What kind of triumph is this? Some are excited enough to take the cloaks off their backs and cover the road. A sort of red carpet. But there is something weird; maybe even foolish. Where are the public leaders – both religious and political? Are they attending to other business; like handling the unpredictable crowds on the outskirts of town who are gathering around this humble prophet who is approaching the city?

And I imagine those merciful eyes of Jesus as he slowly approaches the city. Is that a sad smile or a determined grimace? What is he thinking as he listens to the crowds sing his praise and welcoming his entourage of exuberant disciples. Jesus, for his part, is weeping over the city. Weeping that we do not know the things that make for peace. Does anyone have a clue who he is and what he intends to do now that he has entered the city of power and might? They welcome him as one who blesses them. Yes, but do they understand that Jesus is the King and Prophet who will challenge their customs and even suggests the core of their religious practice is corrupt, empty and without mercy?

No, they don't understand and neither do I. They don't understand that Jesus' kingdom – the kingdom of God – is not about blessing things as they are presently arranged, but changing them until the present arrangement reflects the one God intends. Everything is at risk when Jesus begins his entry into Jerusalem. Political arrangements are at risk, the ones that ensure the poor will remain so forever, that dissidents will be silenced and brute force will be deployed when necessary to maintain political order.

Everything is at risk when Jesus begins his entry into Jerusalem. The same is true when Jesus enters your life and mine. This is costly discipleship.

Our faith declares that putting everything at risk by opening our lives to Jesus' entry is the Good News. God's arrangement is much wiser than our own. We arrange things by making accommodations to a world that crucifies prophets and fears the stranger, puts comfort over compassion, status over service and love becomes a sentimental convenience. We see this in the politics of our day.

This Jesus comes riding into our lives promising to arrange things differently than the world's arrangement. **To those who receive Christ, our life is at risk.** Change – *beautiful change* - is possible. We know what happens: God's folly - we now call it Easter - turns rejection, even crucifixion into an occasion for the healing of creation, the salvation of the world. When you let Christ enter, your life begins a new journey of healing, and service. This is what the Christian faith calls salvation.

This Palm Sunday the most important question is whether you will remain with him when the hosannas of today are over. In Jesus' cross is our healing; in his resurrection is our hope.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

¹ The Undoing of Death. Fleming Rutledge. Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002. Page 3ff. (I am indebted to Fleming Rutledge for this collection of her Lent and Easter sermons, each of which exhibits a remarkable clarity into the heart of the gospel proclamation of this liturgical season.)