

The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-48 (Gen 49:10-11; Zech 9:10-11)

Turn to Luke 19 please. This is Palm Sunday, the week before Easter. In John's Gospel, the people waved palm branches and sang when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. That's why this is called Palm Sunday. Matthew and Mark mention branches, but not palms, and Luke does not mention branches at all. Today we're doing Luke, so no branches. But you'll be happy to know that we can still call it Palm Sunday.

Jesus staged his entrance to Jerusalem. I have heard that when some people enter a room full of people, they plan how they will act when they enter, so the others in the room will notice them a certain way. They don't want to just enter the room, they want to "make an entrance," to make some distinct impression on those in the room.

It does not sound like a bad idea, actually, although I don't know if I've ever done that. I usually figure it out when I get there. Jesus, for his part, does not usually care about things like that, except just this once: he wanted to enter Jerusalem in a particular way, to send a particular message.

Jesus Announces that He's the Coming King (Lk 19:28-34; Gen 49:10-11; Zech 9:9-10)

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. [This is the end of the journey he began in Luke 9.] As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'" Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it."

Luke here keeps talking about untying a donkey that's tied up. He mentions "untying" the donkey four times. I mean, who cares? Somehow, it is important to Luke that the donkey is tied up, and that Jesus wants a donkey that's tied up, so untie. In short, Jesus is telling his disciples, "that's my donkey tied up there, untie him and bring him here."

Listen to this from Gen 49: *He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch. Here is the whole verse: The scepter will not depart from Judah, until he to whom it belongs shall come. The obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch.*

Old Jacob told his son Judah that the tied up donkey belongs to the ruler of nations that will come from him. From Judah. Jesus is saying, "That ruler is me, untie my donkey and bring it."

Luke assumes that we know old Jacob's prophecy to Judah, and we will put this together if Luke says "untie the donkey" enough times.

This story also fulfills the better known Scripture in Zechariah 9. *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.... He will bring peace to the nations, and his rule will extend from sea to sea.*

Quite possibly Zechariah wrote this because he had one eye on Jacob's prophecy about the ruler tying up his donkey.

We know Jesus fulfills Zechariah 9 because Matthew and John quote Zechariah 9. Luke does not quote Zechariah 9, just as Luke does not quote Jacob's Genesis prophecy about tying up the donkey. Luke assumes his readers know the Bible and will figure it out. And now we have. John tells us that the disciples did not make the OT connections on that day, but they did later.

Jesus staged his entrance, that's what we need to see here: Jesus deliberately fulfilled Gen 49 and Zech 9, acting out the role of the coming king, but no one caught that. They did think he was the coming king, and they treated him like a king, but they didn't understand the OT significance of what Jesus did.

So Jesus declared himself the coming Messiah, but without ever saying it. He did it with his actions. And his followers praised him, but did not understand the importance of his actions.. So why exactly did he do it? Because he knew he *was* the coming king, and this is how he was *supposed* to enter. Whether or not anyone was paying attention, he was giving them a message about himself, that he was the one these prophecies had in mind.

Disciples Make him King with their Clothes (Luke 19:35-36; 2 Kings 9)

They brought the donkey to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

A man named Jehu was the commander of the Israelite army in the days of Elisha. (He was famous for driving a chariot in particularly memorable ways, which has nothing to do with today's sermon, but which I think merits honourable mention.) Jehu was with the army and his officers, and a prophet from God came to him and anointed him king of Israel. God was fed up with the current king, and so God had Jehu anointed king.

The army officers immediately took their cloaks off and spread them out under him. They blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!" Why did they put their cloaks under him? So he could stand or sit on a soft place? No, the cloak represents the person. If I give you my coat to sit on, I am putting my entire self under you. My coat represents me, all of me, and I'm under you, you are over me. It is an act of submission.

It is a profound act, to me more significant than waving branches. *“They threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.”* They make him king with their clothes.

Disciples Make him King with their Voices (Luke 19:37-38)

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Their praise is kind of general, they are worshipping as Jewish pilgrims usually worshipped when they entered Jerusalem; but still, it all fits. They have seen God’s goodness through Jesus, and they probably think Jesus in some way will take over Jerusalem, and this will get even better. In any case, with their coats and with their voices, the Lord’s followers really do honour him well on this occasion.

All Creation Behind the Disciples (Luke 19:39-40)

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

I think Jesus might have meant that just as he said it. Jesus the Christ, the Lord of all creation, is entering the city of God. How could his creation be silent?

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountain sing together for joy.
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord. Why? Why should all creation do this?
For he comes, he comes to rule the earth.
He will rule the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

We sometimes think that earth and sea and trees and fields and rocks are made of molecules acting in predictable ways, which is true, and that there’s no more to them than that, which is not true. All creation groans, longing for its freedom, writes Paul.

So the Lord and Redeemer of all creation enters the city of God, and all creation knows this very well. If the disciples had kept quiet, says Jesus, the stones would cry out. (Which probably ended that conversation.)

The Failed Mission of Jesus (Luke 9:41-44)

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

We do not think of Jesus having a significant sense of failure, but we should. John 1 says that Jesus came to his own, but his own did not receive him. He sent the twelve out in pairs, but only to Israelite towns, not to Gentile towns. For three years Jesus called the Jews to turn to God, to repent and receive God’s kingdom, and they did not want it.

Not only did they not want it, they killed him for trying! Jesus wanted to lead Judah back to God, which meant receiving his good news, and he failed to persuade them.

Earlier in Luke, Jesus said, *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.*

Jesus wanted so badly to accomplish something that did not happen. He was faithful, but it did not work. What did happen has turned out for our great good, but don’t forget that in his ministry he wanted to turn Judah to God, to turn Jerusalem to God, and it did not happen. He was a success in that he was faithful to God, but as far as what he often longed to accomplish, he failed.

Jesus Stayed at his Task (Luke 19:45-48)

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

Jesus wiped away his tears, he went into the temple and was horrified at the commercial racket going on there. He drove out the merchants, and told them to treat the temple as God intended, a place to come before God, and not like a robbers’ hideout. He was the coming king, and he acted like it, whether or not they received it.

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

Every day he was teaching at the temple. Jesus stayed at his task. Some people loved him. Some wanted to kill him. Most had no idea. Jesus knew where this was all going. But his task was to teach about God in the temple, and he did it every day.

Jesus' donkey ride into Jerusalem, with the disciples praising God, had to be exhilarating for Jesus. The scolding of the Pharisees discouraged him. The blindness of Jerusalem, and its doom, broke his heart. The market clamor in the temple infuriated him. Where did it all end up? Jesus stayed at his task. Every day he was teaching in the temple courts, until they couldn't stand it any more. Amen.

PRAYER: O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have scars in your hands and your feet, and you are King of kings and Lord of lords. And we are so fortunate to be your flock. Thank you for laying down your life for us your sheep. And now, Lord, we want to live like those who put their cloaks down for you to sit on and ride on. May our lives show that kind of submission to you. Bless us by leading us in your ways. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives us endurance and encouragement also give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.