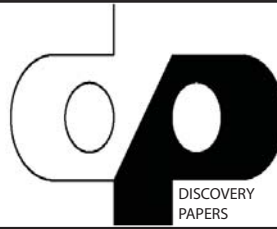


REJOICING AND WEEPING

PALM SUNDAY



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Luke 19:28-44
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Luke 19:28-44

Many people find it hard to believe that God loves them. Even such a one as Jan Johnson, an author and speaker who has preached from our pulpit and spoken at retreats, has written:

“I kept running around looking for someone or something that could convince me that I was indeed the Beloved. I was much more eager to listen to other, louder voices saying: ‘Prove that you are worth something; do something relevant, spectacular or powerful, and then you will earn the love you so desire.’ Meanwhile, the quiet, gentle voice that speaks in the silence and solitude of my heart remained unheard or, at least, unconvincing”¹

We can’t comprehend the love of God in Christ on our own. We’re too suspicious and too prideful. Moreover, the love of Christ “surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:14-19), according to the apostle Paul. Because we can’t comprehend the love of Christ on our own and because the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, Paul prays that God would give us the power, through his Holy Spirit, to comprehend the immensity of the love of Christ and to “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:14-19). May such power be given to us as we observe the love of Christ in Luke 19:28-44.

Jesus’ approach to Jerusalem is commemorated on Palm Sunday, so called because people spread palm branches before Jesus. But as we read Luke’s account, we may be inclined to ask, “Where are the palms?” Each writer of the gospels writes from his perspective, alternately including or excluding certain scenes for his own purposes. Luke doesn’t include the palms in his account, perhaps because the meaning would be understandable to Jews but not to his primarily Gentile audience.

A colt for the king

Luke 19:28-34:

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he

drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” ³²So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ ³⁴And they said, ‘The Lord has need of it.’”

Kings were enthroned in Jerusalem, and Jesus’ followers will shortly hail him as king. Moreover, the Mount that is called Olivet, also called the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem, figured prominently in the hopes of Israel (Zechariah 14). As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, drawing near to the Mount of Olives, hopes are high.

Jesus arranges for his approach to Jerusalem by having his disciples secure for him a colt—that is, the colt of a donkey. The colt hadn’t been ridden yet, just as the cart that carried the ark of the covenant, which represented God’s royal presence, hadn’t been used (2 Samuel 6:3). Moreover, the enlisting of an animal was considered a royal privilege (1 Samuel 8:16).

Literally, Jesus tells the two disciples he appoints to inform anyone who questions them that “the Lord of it [the colt] has need” (Luke 19:34). When the disciples untie the colt, they are literally questioned by “the lords of it”—that is, the owners of the colt. Whose colt is it? It looks as if the colt belongs to Jesus. His need takes priority. Moreover, his need makes things happen.

Jesus, preempting any suggestion by his disciples that his plan is unworkable, prepares them for opposition and instructs them what to do in response to opposition.

Was the colt secured by supernatural means or by prior arrangement? Luke’s narrative doesn’t answer the question. In any event, Luke would have us believe that Jesus is directing events—that both his followers and the owners of the colt are responding to his authority.

Luke reports the question of the owners, but he doesn't report their response to the disciples' answer. The owners must have granted the disciples permission to take the colt, for the disciples bring it to Jesus. As it is, the narrative leaves the impression that it really doesn't matter what the owners of the colt do. The words that Jesus gave to his disciples are powerful enough to secure the colt irrespective of anyone's questions or opposition.

Praise for the king

Luke 19:35-38:

And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As 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, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

As Jesus rides toward Jerusalem, he awakens the story of Solomon, who rode a mule on his way to being anointed as king of Israel (1 Kings 1:33-34). Moreover, the prophet Zechariah anticipated such a scene.

Zechariah 9:9:

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

Jesus' jubilant disciples, alert to the royal implications of the proceedings, not only use their cloaks to make a saddle for Jesus, they also use them to make a carpet, echoing the homage paid to King Jehu (2 Kings 9:13). All of his disciples, not only the twelve, get in on the act, praising God and using a Messianic text, Psalm 118:26, to praise Jesus. Luke's narrative, by echoing texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, portrays Jesus as the Messiah, the ultimate Jewish king. Now his followers come right out and say it: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Psalm 118:26)

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, his disciples, knowingly or not, echo the angels who heralded Jesus when he was born in Bethlehem. Back then, the heavenly host praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the

highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is well-pleased" (Luke 2:14). Likewise, the earthly host praises God, speaking of "peace" and "glory in the highest." What Jesus does—bringing the peace of heaven—is worthy of the highest praise.

High hopes

At some point, often when we start believing in Jesus or shortly thereafter, we, like the disciples who hailed him on the first Palm Sunday, get our hopes up. Or, sometime later, we discover Jesus in a new way, and, again, we get our hopes up. We may have seen him making things happen, overcoming opposition, and directing events, causing us to believe that some major breakthrough was in the offing.

Jesus awakens something in us, just as he awakened something in the disciples. The disciples knew the Hebrew Scriptures and therefore were sensitive to the Messianic implications of Jesus' approach. Even if we're not as sensitive, God has planted the Messianic story not only in the Hebrew Scriptures but also in the human heart. Just listen to a few pop songs or watch a few movies, and you'll hear about the longing for someone or something. As the Eurhythmics sing, "Everybody's looking for something."² We're all looking for a savior of some sort.

Jesus, of course, is *the* Savior, and when we come to believe in him or come to discover him in a new way, he may awaken something deep within us. We may then, at that point, respond the way the disciples and the angels before them did: by rejoicing and praising God, even with loud voices, because of the mighty works we have seen.

At age sixteen, I met Jesus and, indeed, he awakened something deep within me. I began praising him. I also met this beautiful girl right about the same time. I guess you could say I was hoping that Jesus and the girl came as a package deal. Hopes were high.

Although the disciples praise Jesus, not everyone is in a mood to celebrate.

Opposition to the king

Luke 19:39-40:

**And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”
⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”**

While his disciples hail Jesus as king, the Pharisees address him as “Teacher.” Jesus, of course, was a teacher, but this is no time to address him as just a teacher. The Pharisees direct Jesus to rebuke his disciples for hailing him as king, because from their perspective, Jesus quite clearly isn’t the king. The Pharisees by and large were nationalists who favored overthrowing the Romans, who ruled the land of Israel. Jesus not only refused to endorse their agenda, he also repudiated it. Jesus posed a threat to their agenda, so they rain on the parade.

Jesus refuses to comply, but he tells the Pharisees that even if he were to comply, and if his disciples were to keep their mouths shut, it wouldn’t do the Pharisees any good. Why not? Because “the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40) the same way that his disciples were crying out, praising God and hailing Jesus as king. Is that the case: would the stones cry out? Well, Jesus somehow got a colt that didn’t belong to him to serve his purposes. Luke would have us believe that the stones would also be enlisted if the Lord had need of them. Creation—both animate and inanimate—gets into the act. What’s going on here? Something that not only impacts humans but also all creation.

Jesus doesn’t simply refuse to comply with the Pharisees, he also rebukes them for directing him to rebuke his followers. He’s saying to the Pharisees, in so many words: even the stones know better than you.

Opposition in our hearts

Some today, like the Pharisees of old, would rebuke—and even persecute and kill—those who praise Jesus. Churches were bombed earlier this month in a city where we have preached and taught in the past and where we still have ministry partners. Persecution also led organizers earlier this year to cancel our annual trip to another country because they were concerned both for our safety and the safety of those to whom we were planning to minister.

Closer to home, not many would rebuke us for praising Jesus. Some, even if they grant that Jesus was a wise teacher, might think us a little odd, but most of them subscribe to the “live-and-let-live” adage. Mostly, they don’t much care whether we praise Jesus, as long as we don’t foist our beliefs on others. In any event, Jesus isn’t winning most people over around here, just as he didn’t win most people over in Jerusalem.

And, let’s face it, Jesus usually doesn’t do what we want him to do. My hopes, that Jesus and the girl came as a package deal, came crashing to earth. Jesus didn’t cooperate with my aspirations. (Neither did the girl.)

Because Jesus doesn’t do what we want, we may find opposition to him forming in the strangest of places: our own hearts. Here we are, coming to praise Jesus on Palm Sunday, and we may find something within us holding us back.

If disappointment is holding you back, look at Jesus in verses 41-44.

The tears of the king

Luke 19:41-44:

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴²saying “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

The disciples rejoice, but Jesus weeps.

Luke says Jesus “saw” the city, but he sees more than walls and structures. Jesus sees into the hearts of the people of Israel, who want a king—but not the kind of king who is coming to them. Jesus sees Jerusalem, but Jerusalem doesn’t see him. Oh, the city will see him soon enough, as he enters its gates, but it can’t really see him: it can’t see who he is, and it can’t accept his rule. As the king of Israel, Jesus offers peace—first of all, peace with God: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38) the disciples shouted. However, Jerusalem, which represents all Israel, doesn’t recognize its need (Luke 1:79, 2:14, 7:50, 8:48, 10:5-6, 19:38).

On the one hand, Jewish nationalists such as the Pharisees want a king who will make war with the Romans. On the other hand, Jewish collaborators such as the Sadducees, who are in bed with the Romans, don’t want any upstarts disturbing the fragile peace they enjoy with their occupiers. Neither the nationalists nor the collaborators sense any need for peace with God, inasmuch as that they assume they are already in possession of it. Even Jesus’ own disciples, who are currently hailing him as king, have no idea what kind of king he really is and what kind of enthronement awaits him outside the gates of Jerusalem. Sometimes, when opposition to God and his ways reaches a certain point, God cooperates with such opposition: he gives people

what they want. Such seems to be the case as Jesus approaches Jerusalem: Jesus and his ways “have been hidden” (Luke 19:42) from the eyes of Israel—apparently, hidden by God.

Luke 23:21:

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you.” Jerusalem will shout, all right, and shout repeatedly: Jerusalem will shout, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’

Jesus not only sees Jerusalem and into the hearts of her people, he also sees where all of this is headed. Jerusalem ignores the things that make for peace, and it ignores the time of her visitation—that is, Jesus’ ministry to the nation, culminating in his entrance into Jerusalem. Therefore, as God’s judgment, but also as a natural consequence of her power-hungry ways, Jerusalem and her children—that is, her citizens—will be leveled by her enemies. Jerusalem doesn’t know “this day” the things that make for peace; therefore, other “days will come upon” it: days of great distress. Indeed, the Romans would lay waste to Jerusalem in 70 A.D.—not exactly the kind of visitation the city was hoping for. Jesus sees the storm clouds gathering.

Like the prophet Jeremiah, who wept over the fate of Jerusalem in his day, Jesus weeps over the city (Jeremiah 9:1-2, 13:17). In fact, he wept as he was pronouncing God’s judgment on it. When some women of Jerusalem mourned and lamented for Jesus as he made his way to the place that is called The Skull, the site of his crucifixion, Jesus told them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” because of the days that would come upon them (Luke 23:27-31). On that day, one can imagine the stones not crying out in praise, as Jesus suggested they would if they needed to, but weeping because not one of them will be left upon another. The stones, it seems, have a lot to say.

Moreover, if Jesus wept for Jerusalem, which crucified him, we would be right to picture him weeping today for a broken world and for all those who turn away from him and therefore do not know the things that make for peace. Perhaps we should weep with him. Perhaps we should love as he loves, for love for one’s enemies, the love of the oppressed for the oppressor, the love of the abused for the abuser, hard fought and hard won, wrought in the most sacred place of one’s heart—that love conquers the world. In order to get it, you must see it and appreciate it and let it into your heart. We see it, of course, in Jesus.

Praise him for his love

Think about it: Jerusalem will crucify Jesus, and Jesus weeps for Jerusalem. He not only loves his enemies, he also weeps for his enemies—even those who will crucify him! The prophet Isaiah anticipated the Messiah to be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). When his enemies nailed Jesus to the cross and taunted him, he stayed on the cross, even for those who nailed him to the cross and taunted him, though he could have called on more than twelve legions of angels. Where do you find that kind of love among the rulers and saviors of this world?

During one of our intern classes some years ago, I made an off-hand reference to Mark 3:5 and noted that Jesus grieved for the Pharisees even though they were conspiring to destroy him. One of our interns, Gay Gray, began to cry. (I tell this story with Gay’s permission.) She later explained that she had felt distant from Jesus, as if something were holding her back. “I knew something was off,” she said. “I put up walls. I was afraid of too much intimacy.” When she saw in Jesus the kind of love for enemies that eventually brought him to tears, she shed tears of her own. When she appreciated that Jesus grieved for his enemies, her heart opened to him in a new way.

Perhaps this is a love you did not know existed, a kind of love you dared not even hope for. Yet, here it is. Can you believe it? Can you accept it? Can you believe and accept him? Can you stop trying to “prove that you are worth something,”³ stop trying to “do something relevant, spectacular or powerful”⁴ to “earn the love you so desire”⁵ The kind of love we see in Jesus disarms suspicions and dismantles pride. It proves that you’re worth something—worth everything. If Jesus loves those who crucify him, what does this say about his love for you? It is unquenchable! Is not this kind of love deserving of praise? Is not he deserving of praise?

His love for you—his desire to be with you and his desire for your best—is such that he is saddened to the point of tears when you turn away from him.

Sure, Jesus may disappoint you—once, twice, a thousand times. Of course you don’t get what you want! You get something better! What’s that? It’s love. It’s the love of Jesus. On the one hand, if you’re disappointed, you might distance yourself from Jesus. On the other hand, disappointment can disabuse you of the notion that there’s something better than the love of Jesus out there.

When you're holding on to something, when you're hoping for something, there's little space in your heart for anything else. It's really tight in there. Disappointment creates space. It creates space in your heart for the love of Jesus.

Consider his disciples. They hoped Jesus would be enthroned in Jerusalem. Instead, he was crucified outside Jerusalem. Their hopes were crucified! Talk about being disappointed! When Jesus was arrested, they distanced themselves from him. Yet the disciples came to understand that crucifixion was incalculably better than enthronement, and they came to experience Jesus' love for them in a new way. Therefore, they praised him in a new way.

More than fulfilled

Tom Wright, inviting us to imagine that we are journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem, observes:

*"We all have our reasons for wanting Jesus to be enthroned, our private ways of distorting his kingship so it suits our own aspirations or ambitions. The way to Jerusalem must always be also the way of thwarted expectations."*⁶

He also observes:

*"Your expectations will be more than fulfilled. But the only way for that to happen is for them first to be dashed to pieces, broken in fragments on the dusty floor, so that God can make a new jigsaw out of them, one that conforms to his sort of kingdom."*⁷

Yes, your expectations will be more than fulfilled—by the love of Jesus. Therefore, praise Jesus. Praise him for his love.

Endnotes

¹ Jan Johnson, *Enjoying the Presence of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 1996), p. 119.

² "Sweet Dreams." 1982. *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. Comp. by Annie Lenox | David Allan Stewart. BMG/Legacy/RCA/ Sony Music Entertainment, 1983.

³ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶ Tom Wright, *The Way of the Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.