

Sermon preached on Palm Sunday – 10 April 2022

Prepare our hearts, O God, to hear your Word and obey your will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Luke 19:28-40

The Lord needs it

“The Lord needs it” is what the two disciples told the colt owners when they untied it to take it to Jesus. The owners didn’t ask further questions as if they knew who this Lord was or why the Lord needed this particular colt. We thought about the colt imaginatively in our story time, but why did the Lord need it? We’ll explore it through these words – the cross, Jerusalem, and the colt and the disciples.

The cross

The cross can be the most enigmatic thing when it comes to the death of a God. People may ask why God have to die and how God’s death is related to our salvation. What’s the role of the cross in one’s salvation? We may find an example of the cross and salvation in a movie titled *Bruce Almighty*. Unhappy with his present life situation, Bruce Nolan – the protagonist, complains about God many times. Finally, God gives him almighty powers for one week to see if it satisfies him at all. In the end, Bruce realizes that apart from everything, he cannot force Grace – the woman whom he loves, to love him back despite his power. Bruce admits his failure. Now his one last wish is to make sure Grace finds a man that would make her happy. When he lays everything down, including his life, God restores not only his life but also his love, Grace too. The cross is the symbol of Jesus’ self-emptying love for the sake of all. And the journey to the cross had already begun when the word became flesh and began to live among us. Proceeding into the Holy City was part of all that.

Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is depicted as a royal, triumphant one, but we know how the people will turn against Jesus, even if the whole passion story is not read this Sunday. Many in the crowds who hail Jesus as king on this Sunday will be crying out for his crucifixion by Friday. Against their expectation of what a mighty warrior-king would be like who would drive out the Romans, Jesus, who would be held by Roman soldiers, is weak and vulnerable; they will decide that he was not the king they want after all. It looks even foolish to support such a king. But Jesus knew what he had to do. He knew that if he did his Father's will in all this, there

would be precisely the ‘peace in heaven and glory in the highest’ of which the crowds sang, but he also knew where he’d have to go and what he’d have to endure to secure that peace and glory. As such, *Palm Sunday* is not such a bright event in the Lenten darkness in ways. We need to look deep into those eyes of Jesus on this day, the sadness just behind the joy and the deep pity that undergirds the larger celebration.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is important as Jesus will accomplish four things there. He brings about a public demonstration on his behalf. He forces the hand of the Jewish leaders, bringing their timetable in line with God’s. He fulfils the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9.¹ He shows himself to be a messiah who brings peace rather than war. Jerusalem is where Jesus will die, but is also where he will be resurrected. Jerusalem is where the church will be born at Pentecost.² In short, Jerusalem will also be the starting place for the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel.

As soon as we read Luke 19:28 - 40, we instantly notice that Luke 19 does not have a single palm branch in the scene. No ‘Hosannas’ in this text either. Instead of palm branches, people lay their coats down for Jesus to ride upon. Luke simply describes how big the crowd is. The people who do the cheering are only Jesus’ disciples. Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem unfolds over many chapters in Luke, from 9:51, when Jesus ‘sets his face’ to go to Jerusalem. Jesus’ ‘going up’ to Jerusalem is a public event interpreted by Luke as a royal entry. First, Jesus sends two of his disciples to find a colt for him to ride into the city, telling them that if anyone asks why they are untying it, they should simply say, “The Lord (*kyrios*) needs it.” In fact, the owners (*kyrioi*) of the colt *do* ask why the disciples are untying it, and the disciples respond, “The Lord needs it.”³ We may wonder why the colt owners accepted this response so readily. It only shows that Jesus as the *Kyrios* has authority over and above all human *kyrioi*.

When the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God with a loud voice, some of the Pharisees in the crowds become very nervous. Jesus was already warned of Herod’s plot to kill him.⁴ The Pharisees fear the wrath of those in power in Jerusalem, whether it be the Sanhedrin,

¹ “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion, shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.”

² Acts 2

³ Luke 19:30-32

⁴ Luke 13:31

Herod, or Pilate. Despite these political tensions, Jesus is the king of peace and glory in heaven⁵ and he will lay down his life for it.

The colt and disciples

Luke's passion story reveals a variety of human responses to Jesus — from faith and joyful praise to mockery, hostility and violence. Yet throughout this story of vacillating human responses, human blindness, weakness, and hardness of heart, one thing remains constant: God's will to show mercy and save. Despite the total human failure, we can still affirm that God is at work for good even in the midst of this human tragedy.

Then one question we may ask is, "Where do we see ourselves in this story?" We have the advantage of 2000 years of hindsight, and it is easy to judge the characters in the story from a distance. But are we really so very different from them? How quickly does our faith falter when God does not deliver what we are expecting? How quickly does our discipleship falter when we realize the great cost and risks of following Jesus? How often do our self-serving instincts lead us to deny Jesus and his claim on our lives?

We heard the story titled 'Dan the donkey.' We may laugh as we see Dan - the donkey's simple wish to achieve a big dream is childlike, while not knowing what and how to do exactly. People may even laugh at the simplicity of the two disciples. Even though they didn't understand what was to come, they obeyed the Lord, and they were brave enough to tell the colt's owners, "the Lord needs it," without hesitation. Dan, the donkey, and the disciples look similar, marked by this simplicity and bravery for the good news. It also helps us re-examine our faith in Christ Jesus with honesty in this Lenten journey. May God help us with our unbelief. Amen.

⁵ Luke 19:38