

## ***“What Jesus Needs”***

*Luke 19:29-44*

New Revised Standard Version

Palm Sunday is a paradox. It is a day of praises and triumphal entry that leads into a week of pain and terrible suffering. But such is the reality of our lives: we continually pivot between suffering and celebration; we live with pain alongside pleasure; we can be deeply fearful and deeply faithful all at the same time. We are used to being pushed and pulled by paradox, so Palm Sunday is not that different than any other day of our lives except for the fact that it begins Holy Week. It is the beginning of the end for Jesus. But, of course, the end for Jesus is just the beginning for us. Such is the mystery and miracle of resurrection.

But we're not there yet, are we? And because Jesus did not jump from triumphal entry to resurrection, neither then, can we. We must live through Holy Week.

The word holy, both in Hebrew and in Greek, means “set apart,” and perhaps we can only come to understand the

significance of holy week when we “set apart” our OWN hopes and expectations for this week and instead turn our attention to the reality of what Jesus endured, which includes walking slowly and deliberately through all that is wrong in the world and all that we fail to live up to as humans. In as much as we are looking to Jesus on the cross to save us, we will not be saved, and cannot be saved, if we aren't also looking in the mirror at ourselves.

Lucky for us, we are created in the *imago dei*, in the image of God, and we are named beloved even as we are broken, so when we look in the mirror and see the types of things we've seen this week unfolding around us, we also see the reflection of Jesus, and there is no better week than holy week to learn how our cycles of sin do not have to leave us in a place of suffering, but in and through our suffering we can find salvation if we are willing to walk a different way, as a changed and different people. If

we are willing to say Jesus is Lord and Prince of Peace and if we are willing and able to see his heart within our own.

It's been another heartbreaking week. In our country, we live with the unique and horrific trauma of frequent mass shootings. There were 7 mass shootings in 7 days last week, culminating with the 10 people shot and killed in Boulder on Monday.<sup>1</sup> We live with the knowledge that anywhere we go we or our loved ones could be shot – at an elementary school, a high school, or a university, at King Soopers or at Walmart, at church or at Temple or at Mosque, at a movie theatre or a concert or the capital. This is our reality; I'm not trying to be dramatic; but the truth of this fact is simply devastating.

Our souls and our psyches are weak and weary from grieving; we are angry and outraged; and we don't know how much more we can take because when we try to do something or say

something – it never seems to work. No matter how you talk about this, somebody always has a counter argument. But while in our country senseless violent death has become a part of partisan politics, in the kingdom of God, senseless violent death will always be, first and foremost deeply painful because it hurts God's people, and what hurts God's people, hurts God.

So if you feel weary, or worked up (with anger or impatience), or weighed down, or worried, or wounded – you are not alone. Jesus knows about weariness (he has to get away from the crowds sometimes); Jesus knows about getting worked up (he turns over the moneychanger tables in the temple); Jesus knows about feeling weighed down (he invites us to unload our burdens and he himself weeps); Jesus knows about worry (“Lord if there be any other way, take this cup from me?” he prays in the garden of Gethsemane); and Jesus knows about wounds (he

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<sup>1</sup> Josh Berlinger, “The Colorado attack is the 7th mass shooting in 7 days in the US,” *CNN* (March 23, 2021), accessed on March 26, 2021 at

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/23/us/7-mass-shootings-7-days-trnd/index.html>.

has nails driven through his hands, feet, and side and a crown of thorns pressed into his skull), not to mention the emotional wounds of being betrayed, denied, and misunderstood over and over and over again.

Jesus draws near to the wounded and the weary because he knows what it is like to be wounded and weary himself. Jesus never runs from suffering or from tough conversations or from unspeakable emotions – he walks right toward them and Jesus has already endured so much for us and endures with us still.

Jesus will die a painful, horrific, unthinkable death – at the hands of people and authorities who would rather keep things the way they are then usher in a new way of being in the world – a way of peacemaking, a way of shalom, wholeness, or salvation, healing. A way of nonviolence. A way of radical love and hospitality. A way of walking alongside people instead of

walking over them. A way of pointing beyond oneself to others.

It sounds like a way of life that we all long for, doesn't it? And yet we cry out with the psalmist, "*How Long O Lord?*" How long must this pain and suffering go on? How long must we weep?

Well, a little longer, I suppose. Not because this is what God wants for us, but because this is what we, as broken, fallible people, seem to want for ourselves, because to some extent, collectively we keep choosing it; we are stuck in a cycle of suffering and harm. And when I say "we choose it" I do not mean we actively say "I want the world to be this way." But rather what I mean is that it seems that we are choosing it because we've become resigned to it. We have lost our prophetic imagination of what this world can be, of what dream God sought to show us when Jesus came to earth to show us the way – that is, another way. A way beyond

suffering and violence, a way beyond destruction and despair.

I do have hope for our prophetic imagination and for our vision of God's kin-dom to come back to us – THAT is what I long for when I pray, *How Long O Lord?* And here's what helps me know it's possible. We can imagine a world without pandemics – because resources have been poured nonstop into treating the coronavirus and developing a vaccine – into creating again a world where we don't have to socially distance or wear masks, where we can gather together freely. And we're not there yet, but our imaginations are there – and they never left us. From the minute this pandemic started we knew we wanted to address it and fight it and hopefully do everything in our power to eliminate the risk for ourselves and another one.

Somehow though – that same imagination has left us when it comes to finding a solution for gun violence and mass shootings and mental health crises and caring for one

another so deeply that one senseless, violent death is one too many.

We do see immense caring and amazing acts of heroism in these tragedies, such as Officer Talley putting his life on the line for others, but I think often we stop short of imagining what it would be like for him to not have to put his life on the line. Or we stop short of imagining what it would be like if the young man who carried out this shooting was not in so much pain and suffering himself that he created more pain and suffering for others. There will always be tragedies. I'm not saying that we will ever be able to eliminate them fully. But I am asking, or perhaps wondering, honestly and vulnerably with you, have we lost our ability to imagine a world without so much violence? What has happened to our belief that Jesus is the Prince of Peace?

Because not everything is out of our control. We can prevent some things. It will take letting go of some of our individual

rights to regain a sense of corporate and communal responsibility. And somehow I think Jesus knew we wouldn't get there without understanding that we are all connected, we are siblings in the Spirit, we are sisters and brothers. And to be in such a relationship with one another, Jesus says, we must love one another. Which takes seeing others as equal to ourselves. It takes sacrificing something that we want or even think we deserve, for the sake of saving others. Sounds like the cross, doesn't it? It sounds like what makes this week holy, at least for Jesus. And it sounds like what could make every week holy for us, if we followed our Prince of Peace more fully.

In today's text, Jesus is finally entering the city that he set his gaze upon ten chapters earlier. Jesus chooses to enter Jerusalem on a colt, or a donkey – rather than on a military horse, which is what you would see in a Roman military procession. This is a

sign of humility and it's a political statement. Luke is always situating us in the cultural political situation of the day; remember the Christmas story?: *"in those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered,"* (Luke 2:1). Well, here we have again, a reminder that Jesus is not like Caesar.

But even more, the choice of a colt, is a theological choice. Jesus could have ridden any animal in to Jerusalem, or no animal at all, but he chose the animal that would spark the imaginations and memories of the people. Zechariah 9:9: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt."*<sup>2</sup>

Jesus knows what he is doing in choosing a colt; and the Pharisees do too; that's why they want the crowds to be quiet. Their praises are drawing too much attention to Jesus –

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Jacobson, "Commentary on Luke 19:29-44," *Working Preacher* (28 March 2021), accessed on March 28, 2021 at

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/triumphal-entry-2/commentary-on-luke-1929-44-3>.

and the powers that be won't like it. The Pharisees know the scriptures better than anyone and they know just how bold Jesus' choice of a donkey is. Jesus is declaring himself king, albeit a different kind of king, but a king nonetheless.

Now Jesus sort of dismisses the Pharisees concerns because he is used to having negative attention around him and he's never let that hinder his message, ministry, or mission. And in this text, Jesus is trying, I think, to show his disciples how to handle that kind of controversy and concern when it arises.

You see when he's telling his disciples to go and get this colt or donkey for him, Jesus knows that they might get questioned about it and so he says, *"If anyone gives you a hard time just say, 'The Lord needs it.'"*

*"The Lord needs it"??* Have you ever thought about what the LORD needs? We are always telling Jesus what WE need; but how often do we consider what he needs?

We think the Lord needs palm branches and shouts of praise and hosanas and coats and cloaks spread out – but he doesn't ask for any of those things. Those are things the crowd of disciples does without Jesus asking for them, and the crowd doesn't even do all those things in Luke's version; in Luke we only get cloaks – no palms! But it leads me to wonder how often we want to put pomp and circumstance and praise around Jesus when what Jesus perhaps wants, even more than our praise, is our witness of peace, our actions of love.

As Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem and face his death: he asks his disciples to get him ONE thing: a donkey. And this ONE thing symbolizes humility, being WITH the people, which is the opposite of military might and the opposite power OVER the people. It is a visual reminder of the prophetic words of Isaiah and Jeremiah – words of peace, not as in quiet, but as in well-being, shalom, wholeness, restoration.

At the end of this passage, Jesus draws close enough to Jerusalem to see the outline of the city – and he starts weeping. Weeping perhaps like we were this week with Boulder. And through his weeping tears Jesus says, *“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”* (19:42).

Jesus goes on to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem. Whether he’s referring back to the first fall of Jerusalem in 586-7 BCE, or whether he’s referring to the fall of Jerusalem that will come in the year 70, Jesus knows that Jerusalem will be crushed, lives will be lost, even the lives of children, and it will happen because the people of Jerusalem did not recognize God when God was among them (in Jesus) nor did they recognize “The Things That Make for Peace.”

This theme of not recognizing and not seeing in Luke’s gospel has been present from chapter one. Jesus is continually trying

to show us what we are not seeing on our own. And we just never quite have the eyes to see. Back then, and still today. We cannot see the things that make for peace. And that makes Jesus weep. And it makes us weep, too, doesn’t it?

And while we may say, “but I can see them, I know what will make for peace” – and you list off your solutions – whatever they are – the truth is what we see as individuals will not become a reality until we can collectively come together and see the vision of God’s kingdom of peace together. If it just took one person then Jesus would have been that person. But Jesus knew it would take more than just him; that’s why he gathered disciples around him and it’s why Luke will continue to tell the story of God’s vision and kingdom being lived out through the book of Acts; it didn’t start with Jesus and it doesn’t end with Jesus. The prophets have been telling us what makes for peace for centuries. Jesus echoed their words and embodied their message. He

was a peaceful, non-violent leader who spoke of love and who showed love through healing and forgiving and not fighting back. He did not use violence or even the threat of violence to convey his message or coerce his believers. And we are to carry out that same message today.

When Jesus tells his disciples to say to people who question them as they the colt, *“The Lord needs it,”* he’s essentially asking them to say, *“The Lord needs an animal that represents peace, not warfare; the Lord needs something to carry him that represents humility not power.”*

What if Jesus were coming today, to enter the city of Denver, or to enter whatever city you are worshipping from right now, what do you think he would he say that he needs?

Do WE recognize the things that make for peace that Jesus is asking of us? The people and powers that be in Jesus’ day did not. And Jesus wept with them and for them. And the city of

Jerusalem wept too because it was destroyed. Their beloveds were killed too. Not because God did not intervene or try to enter its gates with healing and peace, but because Jerusalem could not see the things that make for peace, it could not see or recognize the very presence of God in its midst. Can we?

As Jesus enters the last week in his life, he does not need us to sing his praises with hosannas or wave palm branches or lay down our cloaks. He will not stop us from doing so, but he also does not ask us to do so. We will worship plenty this week, but more than worshipping him, Jesus needs us to walk with him.

Ultimately what Jesus needs is for us is to see the things that make for peace and to go and get those things and make them happen. He modeled that for us as a savior who rides on the level of his people, that is – a savior who rides alongside pain, and not on top of power. He pointed that colt, that symbol of peace and humility out to his disciples and asked



them to go get it for him and they did.

What is Jesus asking us to go and get as he seeks to enter our city and bring us salvation?

Whatever it is, it will not be easy. Jesus knows that when he asks us for something that goes against the grain of society and culture, that we will be questioned. He knows people will say, “Why do you need THAT? Why are you always talking about THAT issue? Why are you always standing up for THOSE people? Why can’t you just let it go and move on and accept what is?”

When that opposition comes – sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, sometimes from outside of ourselves and sometimes from within ourselves – will we be able to say, like the disciples, “*Why am I doing this? Because the Lord needs it.*”

The Lord NEEDS for us to risk something of ourselves for the sake of everyone else. The Lord

NEEDS for us to rediscover our prophetic imagination. The Lord NEEDS for us to prioritize faith over fear. The Lord NEEDS for us to live in a society where all people have equal access to healthcare, to voting, to food, to housing. The Lord NEEDS for us to not abandon children and families, whether they are at our doorstep or at our border. The Lord NEEDS for us to find the resources for mental health and the regulations on assault weapons so that we don’t keep losing precious life. The Lord NEEDS for us to recognize the things that make for peace and that protect and give dignity to each and every human life so that he can stop weeping. And so that we can too.

And just like the disciples getting that colt, the Lord wouldn’t ask us to go and do those things if he knew we couldn’t do it. He knows we can. The question is, do we? And will we?

Amen.