

A Different Kind of King Luke 19:28 - 40 Rev. Brian Bagley-Bonner

We have heard many times the Passover story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We have heard that it is similar to other entrances of Kings and victorious generals in that time. But it is not the usual kind of parade that welcomes a worldly conquering King. Oh, the best of the Kings of Israel and Judah, yes, their parades were much like Jesus'. Think of the words of Zechariah: *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. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Yes, we have heard that story, but what we haven't heard often was that this was not the only parade at Passover that year. You see Passover is a celebration of God's liberation of God's own people from the slavery and oppression of Egypt. And throughout their history after they were conquered, Passover reminded them that they were once free and often there would be times of demonstration and rebellion against their oppressors. It is no different in Jesus time. And it is fair to say that in that time the Jewish people were once more in a kind of slavery. This time it was the Roman who were their masters.

And so it is not surprising that by Jesus time, riots happened regularly at Passover. So each year the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate left his headquarters in Caesarea fifty miles away to the west and process through the streets of Jerusalem on a war horse, with dozens of chariots behind him, soldiers with swords in hand, the Roman flags flying. (*The Last Week* by Borg and Crossan)

Pilate's entrance was much more typical of a conquering leader of that time. His parade communicated his message clearly: "If you people know what's good for you, you will keep your dreams of freedom to yourself and toe the line." It's the powerful

telling the weak: “Stay in your place or else.” You won’t read about Pilate’s annual parade in the gospels. It’s not there. The only reason we know about it at all is through the stories told by historians and others of the time.

But the fact is, Jesus’ parade through the streets of Jerusalem cannot be totally understood unless you realize that this other parade also takes place. How much more powerful is Jesus’ story when we realize that while Pilate, with his chariots and his armed soldiers and his flags flying was coming from Caesarea in the west... across town at that same moment there was another procession coming from the Mount of Olives in the east.

Jesus was at the head of this parade, but what a contrast. Pilate on a war horse, surrounded by chariots and fully equipped Roman Soldiers - the people watching them with fear and hatred and intimidation. And then Jesus, who comes on a simple donkey, unadorned by any armor or flags or servants. One man alone. Coming into Jerusalem saying God is in charge and I am God’s representative. And how do the people respond? They start throwing their clothing down, probably little more than rags sometimes, and hail him as God’s representative. Then to keep the dust down on the road, they also add some of God’s free gifts -palm branches- to pave his way.

Jesus knew that Pilate’s soldiers would be crying out: “Caesar is Lord” as they passed through the streets... at the same moment his “army” was crying out: “Hosanna (save us) Son of David. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the (true) Lord.” Jesus comes as a hero who conquers, not peoples and armies, but who conquers fear - and given the situation - he clearly has conquered even the fear of death, because his actions on that Passover so long ago, almost guaranteed to turn into a death sentence for him. Jesus was presenting to the world an alternative to everything Pilate and Rome represented—wealth, power, privilege, system that favored the rich at the expense of the poor... A system that boasted how mighty it was because it could meet

out death. But Jesus topped Pilate and Rome by conquering the one thing that they could not: death itself.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem because he knew that though Rome, and indeed any corrupt power, can think it has killed love and truth and goodness, they don't understand that God will simply raise it from the dead. The sun rises in the east - the direction from which Jesus led his followers shining with truth and love and grace - and it is so powerful that even if every human is silent Jesus says the rocks will cry out. Pilate came riding in from the west the place of the setting sun. Indeed almost 2000 years later, the sun has set on Pilate and the Roman Empire. And yet this week and next, we will remember the one who conquered death. The one whose life is remembered and cherished and praised still today, because it had the message of truth. That love always conquers hatred and death. That peace and love and sacrifice are the only way one can conquer and rule people, not with swords or bombs or false bravado.

But I get a little ahead, today and this Holy Week, we will remember the pain and the sacrifice and the fear and the bloody sweat of anxiety and the horror of crucifixion, perhaps the most cruel form of death ever imagined. The week starts with people welcoming God's King, and it will end with a small sign of above him as he dies on the cross that says "The King of the Jews."

We cannot truly understand Easter, unless we get to it through the cross of Christ. That is why we do not end with the Palms today, but look ahead to Friday. AMEN

(scripture on back of page)

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power 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 heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."