

The Things That Make for Peace

Meditation on Luke 19:28-44

March 20 (Palm Sunday) 2016

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, '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. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it." ' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As 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, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.' As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'

Friday began as an ordinary day. I was working from home, preparing for Sunday worship. Jim was out running errands, one of which included dropping off our two dogs at the groomer. Molly the sheltie and Mabel the Pomeranian were carrying in all sorts of debris from the trees outside--matted in their long, thick hair. And it's hot enough now for their "summer" haircuts.

So on Friday I am working on my prayers and liturgy, when the phone rings. “Hi, this is so and so from Doggie D-tails. Did you know that Mabel is crawling with fleas?”

My heart sank. “Oh, no! Not fleas!” The dread of every pet owner! If one indoor pet has fleas, they all do--and they’re in your house, so you’ve got them, too.

“Oh, no!” I said again, as the nice lady told me about using Borax on our carpet to kill the flea eggs that were going to keep hatching every couple of days. Oh, joy.

Then I remembered how poor Melvyn the cat had been scratching himself lately until hunks of his hair came out. I should have known it was fleas! All the signs were there. How did we miss it? What were we thinking?

The rest of Friday was anything but ordinary for the Crawford household. Poor Melvyn had his first bath since he decided to move in with us 3 years ago. I lathered him up with the flea shampoo--and there they were--crawling all over his body, trying to hide, trying to survive. Those bad ole fleas were going to die! Melvyn wasn’t crazy about his first flea bath. Maybe his first bath ever because I had never given him a bath. He didn’t have fleas in Minnesota when he showed up at our door. And he became an indoor kitty as soon as he came inside and said, “This is a good place. They feed me here. I think I’ll stay.”

He was a good boy in his bath. He didn’t thrash around or scratch me. He tried to climb out, but I wouldn’t let him, so he looked deep into my eyes and let out a mournful yowl. I think he figured out, though, that if I were going to kill him, I would have done it by now.

And then, baths aren’t too bad when Mom keeps the water and soap out of my eyes and ears-- holds me in her lap and rubs my belly and my chin. I

don't think he cared for the wire brush, though. I held him and brushed him, and the fleas were jumping off him --and landing on me. Bad ole fleas! After a few minutes of towel drying and brushing, Melvyn began to relax in my arms. I think he sensed that his itchy body was going to get better. Or maybe he was remembering that it was almost time for lunch!

I had my work cut out for me before Molly and Mabel came home--cleaning, bleaching, washing, vacuuming--eradicating the fleas. Molly looked much better--and happier--after her flea bath and haircut. (Mabel looked and felt much better, too.

Our reading in Luke today recounts Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. His journey to the Holy City--and to the cross-- began in Galilee about 3 years earlier. Most recently, he was with his disciples in Jericho, where he calls to Zacchaeus, a short, unpopular toll-collector, who climbs a tree so he can catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passes by. Then Christ, who came to eat and drink with sinners and seek and save the lost, invites himself to Zacchaeus' house for dinner.

Jericho is 27.75 km (around 17 miles) from Jerusalem. Jesus is truly going "up" to Jerusalem in this journey, as verse 28 tells us. Jerusalem is about 2,500 feet above sea level; Jericho is more than 800 feet below it. Once Jesus reaches the Mount of Olives, the path to the Holy City descends for about a mile, as seen in this modern photo. Jesus and his followers have made the entire journey on foot, thus far. But now he sends two of his disciples to borrow a colt from the "village ahead" for him to ride for this final mile, not because he is tired, but so his identity as the Messiah, Jerusalem's "king," will be proclaimed, as will the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: "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.”

Coming up from Jericho on the Roman road, one would approach the villages of Bethphage and Bethany on the hill overlooking Jerusalem from the east, above the Kidron Valley. The small village of Bethphage, whose name means “House of Unripe Figs,” was on the Mount of Olives and is only mentioned in this episode in the New Testament. This scene appears in all 4 gospels, with some differences. Luke’s animal is a “colt” --the Greek word *polos*-- the same as Mark’s. *Polos* could mean a “young horse, a colt” or a “young male donkey.” Matthew uses the word *onos* meaning “donkey” and talks about 2 animals--a female donkey with a foal--and has Jesus somehow riding both. Luke, like Mark, specifies that Jesus ask for an animal that has never been ridden.

Are some of you looking for the word, “Hosanna”? This is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew or Aramaic word that means not “Praise God” but “Save us, *now*” or “Please, save us!!” Hosanna is in Matthew, Mark, and John, but not here. And how about the palm branches? Where are they? The palms are only mentioned in John. Matthew says, “cut branches” and Mark says, “leafy branches.” Luke, Matthew, and Mark talk about the people’s cloaks that are spread on the back of the animal before Jesus rides and laid down in the road before him.

Jesus’ arrival brings division in Israel, as Simeon in Luke 2:34-35 prophesies when Jesus is 8 days old, ““This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”” The crowd praises God for all the powerful deeds they have

seen while some Pharisees insist that Jesus make his disciples be quiet. Why? Are they afraid the noise will attract Roman soldiers and give them an excuse to punish them? More likely they are offended or angry that the crowd is declaring Jesus the Messiah by singing from Psalm 118, only substituting “king” for “the one” : “Blessed is *the one* who comes in the name of the Lord.”

These words echo Jesus’ own in 13:35, when he laments, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Studying this passage, I am moved by Christ’s sorrow over the two things that Jerusalem fails to *see*: “*the things that make for peace*” and its “*visitation from God.*” The people of Jerusalem don’t recognize that Jesus is the Messiah--sent from God to save us from our sins. The crowd of Jesus’ so-called disciples also fail to understand who Jesus is and what it will mean at his journey’s end. They don’t understand that knowing Jesus means serving Him, seeking to be like the one who, as Paul teaches in Philippians, “emptied himself of His divinity” to become a slave, taking on our fragile, human form. He “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

Not even the original 12 foresee Christ’s death and resurrection, though Jesus warns them 3 times in Luke--in 9:21, 9:44 and 18:31-34, when he “took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be

mocked and insulted and spat upon. ³After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.” They understand “nothing about all these things.” “What (Christ) said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

Friends, we might be tempted to read this passage and say, “What’s wrong with Jerusalem? Why don’t they see?” Or, “What’s wrong with his disciples who don’t grasp what Jesus is teaching them?” But that’s not why we read God’ Word--to condemn others. We read Scripture so that our hearts will be open to hear God’s will for our lives. The truth is that we often fail to see things God wants us to see---good and bad-- when the signs are right in front of us. Think of how I was blind to the fleas that were on my pets, and yet I saw all the signs. I should have known!

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week in our Lenten journey, as we remember with gratitude the ministry and sacrifice of Christ. Like the disciples of Jesus’s time, we need help to recognize God’s *visitation*--the Spirit’s guiding, healing presence with us. So come with me now. Let us draw ever nearer to the throne of mercy and grace to confess our blindness and disobedience and find forgiveness and unconditional love. Let us ask the Lord to illumine for us the things that were hidden from God’s people long ago- things we fail to recognize even today. May the Lord reveal to us--so that we may show the world-- *the things that make for peace*.

The cross looms ahead.

Let us pray.

Holy One, we thank you for your Word that guides us throughout our lives. Open our eyes, Lord, to the things that we need to see. Forgive us for our spiritual blindness and disobedience. Humble our hearts throughout this

Holy Week and draw us nearer to you. May we feel your loving presence with us each day. Stir us to boldly confess our sins and receive your forgiveness and unconditional love. Speak to us of your will and teach us the things that make for peace so that we may be a light to the world--and be the people you have ordained for us to be. In Christ we pray. Amen.