

Sightings

Meditation on Luke 19:28-44

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Palm Sunday: March 25, 2018

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ 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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ 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, ³⁸ saying,

*"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

⁴¹ As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² 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. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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."

Our spring festival yesterday, our Eggstravaganza, was such a blessing. That's what I heard from families and from volunteers who shared stories with me at the end. We had all sorts of help from our congregation with this powerful outreach to the community. Thank you for your faithful response to our invitation to serve!

We planned for a multitude, hoping 900 plastic, candy-filled eggs would be enough. Turned out, it was plenty! We had a nice crowd, but it wasn't crowded.

Families said this was a good thing. One mom had come from an egg hunt at a large church in Titusville; the entire town was invited, she said. They left early and drove to Merritt Island. The children could take as long as they wanted for our activities. The leaders could spend more time helping each child and talking with family members.

As we prepared for this big event, we hoped and prayed for opportunities to build relationships, bless and serve our neighbors. We prayed that whoever would come, would have their hearts open to experience the peace and joy of the Lord.

I trusted that God would use us to bear witness to the compassion and gentleness of Christ our Savior, our humble, servant king.

Today, on Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, we remember Christ's dramatic entrance into Jerusalem. After ministering throughout Galilee, he has nearly reached the city of his destiny, the goal of his wanderings. But

first, a colt must be found and brought to Jesus. Those following Jesus will recognize the symbolism of Christ riding on the back of a colt, never been ridden, as fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy.

At the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples to find and untie a colt in the "village ahead." We encounter a number of points of uncertainty with this text. One is that Luke names two villages, but which one is the one "ahead?" The first one mentioned is "Bethphage," meaning "house of unripe figs;" the actual site is uncertain, though there is a "Bethphage" religious site on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, with a Franciscan church on it. The other village, "Bethany," which means "house of dates" or "house of misery," (another point of uncertainty and debate) is where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived --and where Lazarus was raised from the dead --and where a woman anoints Jesus with expensive perfume . Bethany is also where the risen Christ will ascend into heaven in Luke 24.

Then, Jesus sends the disciples to get a "colt." But Luke uses the Greek word "polos," which means "a young animal, foal," but isn't the usual word for donkey-- "onos" -- that Matthew uses. "Polos" could mean a young horse. But that wouldn't fit with Zechariah's prophecy in 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Still, the important message is not the geography or vocabulary. It's that the disciples trust him and things go exactly as Jesus tells them. This ride of the Messiah is part of God's larger, mysterious plan. Who has Jesus become in the eyes of this crowd of disciples? Their spreading of their cloaks on the

road is the welcome of a king. They celebrate Jesus by singing praises to God for all His “deeds of power, beginning with the first line of Psalm 118:26. But they substitute “the king” for “he.” *“Blessed is **the king** who comes in the name of the Lord.* And, “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” reminds us of the angels singing at Christ’s birth in Luke 2:14.

All peace and joy is interrupted when some Pharisees, who use the human title of “Teacher,” urge Jesus to rebuke his disciples. They may fear the Roman Empire’s response to this display of adoration. But Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, instead.

As he draws nearer to the Holy City, he weeps, knowing the terrible fate of Jerusalem. If only they had recognized the things that would make for peace, he says. This is a play on the name Jerusalem, which contains the Hebrew root S-L-M, “*shalom*,” for a peace that is also “wholeness and completeness.” Christ’s identity is hidden from the Pharisees, but what about the crowd of followers, who give our humble, servant king a royal treatment on the road to Jerusalem, but then betray and desert him at the cross?

Yesterday, I had many sightings of our Lord. But I was looking for him, hoping in him, trusting and expecting to see him. I saw Christ in the laughter and smiles of children, parents, and grandparents. In the encouraging words and warmth of volunteers. I saw Christ in the provision of not just all that we needed, but more than what we needed. In the

intimate conversations that just happened, without my seeking them. One lady shared her joy that the adoption of her child is finally complete. She had tears in her eyes. One grandmother who came with her grandchild told me she misses Kids Klub so much, she wants to come back. The grandmother vowed that she will work hard to make that happen. Her granddaughter came up to hug me at the end of the morning to say goodbye and thank you-- for everything. Her eyes sparkled.

And I saw Christ, alive again, forevermore.

Our humble, servant king.

Let us pray. Holy One, thank you for your blessings to us, for your Spirit that is with us always, helping us do your will. Thank you for Jesus, our humble, servant king, who, though he died on the cross, lives again forevermore. Thank you for the many volunteers who serve this congregation, who love you with all their hearts and give so much of themselves for your sake. Help us, Lord, to love one another, and to share Jesus with the world. In His name we pray. Amen.