

The Counter-Procession that Changes Everything

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish

Passion Weekend

April 13-14, 2019

Luke 19:28-40

Grace and peace to you from Christ, who is the True King. Who comes to bring life, love, and peace. Whose entrance procession counters powers of this world and counters our expectations. Amen.

Move 1: Introduction

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. A week full of heavy emotions, tension, and anticipation. A week that reveals humanity's diverse and also real responses to Christ: faith, adoration, and trust, as well as betrayal, violence, and denial.

We enter today and this week not taking Jesus' procession casually or lightly. We do so with eyes open. Ears open. Hearts open. To hear again the passion and let the drama unfold.

We pause to reflect on Jesus' knowing full well that his final week of earthly mission begins.

Right off the bat, we recognize that, despite humanity's hardness of heart and falling victim to mob mentality, Jesus remains true. From the beginning to his entry into Jerusalem, Jesus follows God's will. He is unwavering.

And in doing so, reveals to us a different Kingdom than this one. A different way of living. A person in which we can place our hope and our faith.

The one constant of this week, of today, is Christ's will to love and to save. [1]

In Luke, it was all the way back in chapter 9 when Jesus set his face to Jerusalem. And throughout his journey, he has taught, healed, loved, and shown God's mercy.

And along the journey, he has been warned: "Turn back. Don't continue on. Do you know what they will do to you if you keep speaking the way you are? Including people the way you are? I mean, welcoming and eating with sinners, Jesus! Stop this affirming and loving of the marginalized. The powers of this world won't take kindly to this change

of the status quo. It doesn't go with the imperial, empire thinking and way of doing things."

Jesus hears all this. Knows all this. Understands the threats, opposition, and dangers he faces. And, yet, he remains true. Undeterred in his mission to reveal that he is the True King sent to reveal the True Kingdom, which has space and a place for all.

In today's Gospel, Jesus finally reaches the city of Jerusalem. Luke chapter 19 tells the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into the city. Upon first glance, this entrance appears to be some impromptu parade, full of cheers and adoration. Multitudes of disciples line the streets. Mobs of people shout hosanna and wave their palm branches.

Growing up, I used to view Palm Saturday/Sunday as a cheery event that had almost a birthday-party vibe to it, with props to wave (palm branches), kazoos, and upbeat music. Think Tik Tok's *Kesha*: "The party don't start till I walk in." Her music was definitely playing in the background when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Yet this understanding of Jesus' royal entrance doesn't take into account the context of what is happening in Jerusalem during the time Jesus decides to enter the city. It doesn't take into account the intentionality and purposeful choices Jesus makes prior to making his much anticipated arrival.

Move 2: Christ chooses a colt

Christ isn't some passive recipient of some impromptu adoration by the mobs of people. His entry is intentional. [2]

We hear in Scripture that, prior to arriving, Jesus goes ahead of the crowds and disciples. There he tells two disciples to go into the nearby village and untie a colt and bring it to him.

Jesus doesn't just stroll or walk into Jerusalem. He has to get himself some wheels. He plans his mode of transportation. A colt. That is how he will enter. On a colt's back. A lowly and humbling animal. Unthreatening. Not flashy.

Fun question: What mode of transportation would Jesus arrive in today, do you think? I say a mini-van. Spacious room for his disciples. And plenty of cup holders.

This entrance on a colt is not by accident. It's not a lapse in judgment. Jesus didn't get the last rental car in the lot. This is his first pick.

And it's important. It fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly ... shout aloud ... your King comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). [3]

Through this choice, Jesus reveals he is the awaited anointed one. The one God promised to send to bring redemption and restoration, and to reconcile the world back to God.

Zechariah and the prophecy hang in the backdrop of Jesus' royal entrance. It serves to affirm who Christ is: The Messiah. And it heightens the drama of everything.

Move 3: Christ chooses to enter during Passover

Aside from Jesus' choice of transportation, Jesus also decides to enter the city during Passover, during the busiest and most celebrated time.

Again, this is not an accidental choice.

The Jewish Passover invokes and memorializes the Exodus narrative where, thanks to divine intervention and activity by God, the Israelites were liberated from the oppressive Egyptians. [4]

There is tremendous tension already present in the city prior to Jesus even stepping foot into Jerusalem.

Scholars estimate that back then, 50,000 to 200,000 people would have come to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Jewish Passover. [5]

And because of the overtones of the Passover message, of God triumphing over powers of this world to free God's people, Roman officials would have made sure that the mobs of people knew a revolution like the one in Exodus wasn't going to happen on Rome's watch. [6]

As Marcus Borg and John Crossan point out, every year during Passover, the Roman Governor would leave the nice palace from the coastal West and ride into Jerusalem. And every Roman Governor would make sure that the people knew who was in charge, would keep things orderly.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor at the time of Jesus. And Pilate would have ridden in from the West as a visual reminder to the crowds of how powerful and mighty Rome was. Pilate's procession into the city would have been full of cavalry on horseback, foot soldiers, armor, banners, and weapons. [7]

This is the expected entrance of a king. At least, what humans were exposed to and experienced here on earth.

Move 4: Christ's procession

But Jesus' procession looks nothing like Pilate's. And, again, that's intentional.

His choice of colt is to affirm who he is: the True King. It's not about humility; it's about identity.

Jesus isn't being bashful nor passive as he enters Jerusalem. He is bold. Intentional.

This isn't a parade for Jesus; it's a counter-protest. It's meant to mock and poke fun at the ridiculousness of Pilate. It's meant to reveal the pomp and misplaced trust in might and power.

Jesus' procession is an anti-imperial demonstration. He doesn't ride in on a horse with armor; he is in common clothes, sandals and riding on the most unmilitaristic animal possible.

Jesus arrives from the East and, in doing so, intentionally engages in peaceful and yet poignant protest against injustice and oppressive powers of this world. And he does so knowing the risks. Knowing the dangers. Knowing full well this would hasten his crucifixion. [9]

Move 5: Mob mentality

But at first we think, "No, the party is here." The multitudes of disciples adore Jesus. They throw and spread their garments. Wave their palms as Jesus processes in. Even if they don't completely understand Jesus' choices and intentions, the multitudes praise him joyfully.

The word "multitude" reminds of us Luke 2, when the multitude of angels visited the shepherds in their fields, praising God and saying, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." Only here it's the disciples, the crowds who are calling out with joy. They are seemingly affirming who Jesus is. It's not God's agents or messengers who are affirming Christ's identity; as it was at his birth, it's the people.

However, we soon know, this same multitude, these same disciples, will turn into a mob.

And seeing Jesus in chains—vulnerable, weak—the mob decides either that following him is too dangerous and risky for their liking OR that this isn't the king they want. [10]

Move 6: So what?

The multitudes of disciples. They aren't named, so we can place ourselves in the story.

Similarly, the city of Jerusalem is symbolic of not just those present during that time within the city limits. The city represents all of humanity. Us. And reveals both the light and shadow side that lives in every one of us.

“It reveals how similar we are. How quickly our faith falters when God doesn’t deliver what we expect. How quickly our discipleship falters when we realize the risks of following Christ. How quickly we become close-fisted and not stewards and deny Jesus’ claim on our lives.” [11]

So where is the good news in that? For me, it’s not in the crowds fleeting rejoicing and adoration. It’s not in the mob or multitudes. It’s in Christ, who is the one constant.

Who is the one True King. Who reveals that our True Kingdom is not of this world. Who enters into our lives despite knowing our human instincts and tendencies to fall into mob mentality.

Yet Jesus’ mission to save and spread love never wavers. God’s will continues forward no matter how we react or respond. No matter if we boo or applaud.

Jesus reveals that he is the King of Peace, here to bring reconciliation of the whole world that is so set and obsessed with might, violence, and power. Christ came to redeem us and bring us all back into God’s loving and merciful embrace.

Jesus’ entry cost him everything. Yet, in it, we gain everything.

We follow the counter-procession. The one who risked everything. The one who set us free from the chains of sin and the bonds of death.

May we not join in today’s procession lightly. May we risk as Christ did and be blessed with boldness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, even when others claim it cannot be done.

Amen.

Resources

[1] Johnson, Elisabeth. “Luke 19:28-40 Commentary,” workingpreacher.org, April 14, 2019.

[2] Thomas, Debie. “Parade or Protest,” *Journey with Jesus: A weekly webzine for the Global Church*, journeywithjesus.net, March 18, 2018.

[3] Johnson, Elisabeth. “Luke 19:28-40 Commentary.”

[4] Brown, Michael Joseph Brown. “Commentary on Luke 19:28-40,” workingpreacher.org, March 20, 2016.

[5] Thomas, Debie “Parade or Protest.”

[6] Brown, Michael Joseph Brown. “Commentary on Luke 19:28-40.”

[7] Thomas, Debie. “Parade or Protest.”

[8] Thomas, Debie. “Parade or Protest.”

[9] Thomas, Debie. “Parade or Protest.”

[10] Johnson, Elisabeth. “Luke 19:28-40 Commentary.”

[11] Johnson, Elisabeth. "Luke 19:28-40 Commentary."

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Reflection Questions

- If Jesus were to ride into Aurora today, what would be his means of transportation?
- What powers and imperial might would Jesus be working against today?
- How quickly does our faith falter when God does not deliver what we expect? How does our discipleship falter when we realize the risk of following Jesus?