

## **The Lord Needs it**

A Sermon Preached by Anne Keener  
First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

April 13, 2025

*Palm Sunday (Year C)*

Luke 19:28-44



We have been on this Journey to Jerusalem since Ash Wednesday. Many of you gathered here in this sanctuary to receive ashes placed upon you in the sign of a cross as you heard the words dust you are and dust you shall return. These words echoed within this space and within each heart reminding us of our morality.

Then we gathered for worship on the first Sunday in Lent to hear the Temptation of Jesus. You may recall that in Luke's account, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The Spirit accompanied him during the 40 days and throughout his encounter with the Tempter. Even in his depleted state, Jesus was able to recall scripture and offer it in response to each temptation.

Now, we have arrived at this week we call Holy, and we hear that "Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." Did you catch that? Jesus went on ahead. This foreshadows what is to come. Even though the crowd will soon be surrounding him and laying their cloaks on the road, the journey to the cross is a solo journey. It is a journey no one can take for Jesus, and he knows this. According to Luke, Jesus has been on this journey for 10 chapters, since back in chapter 9 when we are told, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus will continue to go on ahead. He will go on ahead of the disciples who followed him that day, and he has gone on ahead of us, disciples who follow him today.

I love the joyful procession of Palm Sunday with the choir and children waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!" but did you notice that Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem includes neither palm branches nor Hosannas. For Luke, having the crowd spread their cloaks on the road was enough of a symbol to signify the arrival and welcome of a king of Israel. We had "Hosannas" echoing throughout this sanctuary during our joyful procession, but in today's reading the multitude of the disciples gathered that day joyfully praised God shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

The multitude of disciples also know their scripture as their shouts come from Psalm 118, but they omit the "Hosanna, Save us!" that other gospels include. This seems odd at first but then makes sense when you think of Luke's audience. He wrote primarily for a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, and Hosanna was a Hebrew word. Luke chose to focus on the themes of kingship and peace.

The followers of Christ were expecting a king, but their expectation of a king was someone to overthrow the power of Rome. The power of Rome that made its presence known that Passover week through a procession into Jerusalem from the West. A procession described in the *Feasting on the Word* commentary with “Pilate draped in the gaudy glory of imperial power: horses, chariots, and gleaming armor.<sup>1</sup>” But we, of course, are more familiar with the one that comes from the East down the Mount of Olives where in a commoner’s procession, Jesus entered in an ordinary robe riding on a young donkey, a borrowed colt.

As you may recall, Jesus is fulfilling the words from Zechariah, “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.”

These two processions highlight different types of kingships. Again, to borrow words from the commentary, “Ceasar’s kingdom is based on domination and ruthless power, the kind of kingship Jesus refused when tempted in the wilderness. The kingdom of God Jesus preached is based on justice, mercy, and the love of God.<sup>2</sup>” Jesus is “a new kind of king, a king of peace who will dismantle the weaponry of war.<sup>3</sup>”

Jesus isn’t just a king of peace, but the King of Peace. However, the followers of Jesus couldn’t comprehend this type of kingship even though they had long been waiting for the coming king described in Isaiah where it says:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulders,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Peace is often thought of as the absence of conflict, but for Christians, peace is more than that. Peace seems less about the absence of struggle, and more about the presence of love<sup>4</sup>. Peace is rooted in the Hebrew word shalom which encompasses wholeness, well-being, harmony, and reconciliation.

The chant of the crowd, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” is pointing us to a multitude of the heavenly host singing about “Peace on earth” to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, and now the multitude of disciples are shouting “Peace in heaven.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 2*; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2009; p. 153

<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 2*; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2009; p. 155

<sup>3</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 2*; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2009; p. 153

<sup>4</sup> Wishful Thinking and later in Beyond Words <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2018/9/11/peace>

Jesus Christ is indeed the Prince of Peace. At his birth, we hear “Peace on earth” and now, in his final entry to the City of Peace, we hear “Peace in heaven.” That indeed is where Jesus is going on ahead of us yet again. The King of Peace will once again be in heaven seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Peace in heaven is being declared during this triumphal entry to Jerusalem, the place where they believed heaven and earth connected, the Holy City, the Temple which includes the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place that housed the Ark of the Covenant.

Luke doesn’t let us linger in this joyful entry long as we learn some of the Pharisees in the crowd say to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” Once again, Jesus’ knowledge of the Hebrew Bible is the foundation of his profound response, “if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” He is referencing Habakkuk where it says the very stones will cry out. If the people are silent, even creation will shout out and proclaim the redemption promised by God. There is nothing that can be done to stop God’s message of peace and love from being proclaimed.

Following this interaction with the Pharisees, Jesus pauses on the Mount of Olives to look at the city on this his final approach into Jerusalem. I chose for us to pause the story here today alongside Jesus. As Jesus pauses, he weeps. He weeps for the future fate of Jerusalem, for its destruction, and for the pain that will come. He laments for the city, “If you...had only recognized ... the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” The City of Peace, that doesn’t have eyes to recognize the King of Peace, will be destroyed leaving not even one stone left upon another.

Jesus is lamenting their inability to recognize their visitation from God, the Son of God and the King of Peace. He is lamenting their blindness to the things that make for peace, for shalom, for wholeness. Jesus is lamenting the blindness of the multitude of disciples which includes us, for we too fail to recognize the King of Peace in our midst and the things that make for peace.

During my sabbatical journey to the Holy Land, our group walked this Palm Sunday path down the Mount of Olives and paused at the Church of Dominus Flevit, which is translated “The Lord Wept.” This beautiful church is fittingly built in the shape of a teardrop. Outside the church, our group paused to hear this scripture from Luke read while looking out on the Temple Mount. Like Jesus, we paused on our descent down the Mount of Olives to lament. We paused to lament what Jesus endured for us and to confess our blindness, and I found myself weeping just as Jesus wept.

Today, like the multitude of disciples gathered, our voices shout “Hosanna,” but our actions too often shout, “Crucify him!” Friends, we don’t have to actually utter the words to be part of the crowd shouting to crucify. Our silence can also speak.

As much as it saddens me, we stand with both crowds. We point people to Jesus with shouts of “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord,” but we also point people away from the King of Peace each time we reject the ways of peace by choosing human kingship that sees the world through the lens of “us” and “them” and who tells us they are willing to trample our earthly enemies rather than love our enemies and work for peace.

As we journey through Holy Week, let us make space to reflect on both the ways we praise Jesus and the ways we betray Jesus. Who and what do we worship? How do our words and actions align with the teachings of Jesus? Yes, we are lifting our voices today with the multitude of disciples, but will we also hear the mandate, partake in the Last Supper, stay awake to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, journey to the cross, and grieve at the tomb before joyfully arriving again on Easter? We come on Sundays to join our hearts and minds to worship God Almighty, but do our words and actions throughout the week pave the way for the King of Peace?

We began our Journey to Jerusalem reminded of our mortality with the texture of the ashes and the echoes of dust you are and dust you shall return. We know where this triumphal entry will lead, but the multitude laying their cloaks on the road did not. When Jesus sent two disciples into the village to bring back a colt that had never been ridden, he instructed them to simply say to any who asked why, that “the Lord needs it.”

What does the Lord need of us?

Jesus needed the colt to fulfill those words, “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.” What does Jesus need of us to fulfill his work in our hurting world?

Jesus understood the paradox of this joy filled procession leading to the pain that is to come. We continue to live in a world filled with paradox, with joy and suffering. We both lift our joyful voices in praise and are complicit in betrayal.

May each of us take time to pause and reflect at each step of this Holy Week journey because if we do, it will make the celebration that awaits us next Sunday even more joyful.

What does the Lord need of us this week and beyond? This is certainly an important question, but it is also important to remember that Jesus has gone on ahead of us and that when we are silent, when we fail to speak up or speak out, creation itself will shout out on our behalf.

May it be so. Amen.