

Palm Sunday C 10 April 2022  
Luke 19:28-40  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*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." Let's pray: . . .*

Palm Sunday. The Sunday of the Passion. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. All titles that help us zero in on Jesus' momentous entry into Jerusalem for the last time as a free man. But, I'm curious. What exactly is the triumph in today's gospel? We call it the triumphal entry, but it doesn't really look all that triumphant. Jesus doesn't sit valiantly astride a mighty beast. He sits on a borrowed colt, a young donkey. He has no army of followers counting cadence as they march. He has a few disciples singing praises to God. They don't carry banners bearing insignias that demand recognition and submission. In their place, old clothes are thrown on a mountain path. A bit further on after today's gospel reading, we find Jesus weeping. Today's gospel describes both a literal and a figurative downhill ride to Jerusalem, that resembles little of what we'd expect when we hear of triumph. There're no high fives, no, "We are the champions!", no victory speeches. Triumph for Jesus is about the fullness of life.

By characterising Palm Sunday as "Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem", we diminish the fullness of Jesus' life and his mission. We have to backtrack a bit to understand that Jesus' triumphal entry doesn't begin with a colt on the Mount of Olives. The triumphal entry begins 30 odd years earlier with a

woman called Mary saying, “Let it be.” Those three seemingly innocuous little words electrified the cosmos, thundered through the heavens and opened the door for God to enter human life and history in a physical, tangible, and very personal way. If we think the triumphal entry is simply Jesus riding a colt from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, we’ll surely miss the good news of Palm Sunday. The triumphal entry is far more expansive than this day and one event.

God’s incarnation and entry into human life and history is the triumphal entry. Jesus’ movement from Mary’s womb to Bethlehem’s manger is the triumphal entry. Jesus’ life, is the triumphal entry. Every point where Jesus’ life and ministry intersects with the reality of our lives is a point of triumphal entry. The triumphal entry is Jesus bringing good news to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, giving sight to the blind, release to the captive, setting the oppressed free. The triumphal entry is Jesus including the outcast, setting a place at the banquet for the unacceptable, forgiving sinners, loving enemies, raising the dead to life. Everywhere he goes, Jesus tramples the cloaks that attempt to conceal the fullness of life. Everywhere Jesus goes he reveals new life, new hope, new possibilities.

And unlike some politicians who promise everything under the sun during election campaigns, and then seem to suffer from amnesia the minute they’re sworn into office; Jesus doesn’t roll into town and dominate, coerce, control, or promise to fix everything. Yet, that’s probably how most of us would like him to be. We’d like the triumphant Jesus to pluck us out of the difficult and painful circumstances of our lives. But that’s not what Jesus does. Jesus doesn’t cajole, sweet talk, or try to bamboozle anyone with spin. Nor does he flex time off, or offer just a little taste of what might be. He does much more. He offers himself; all of himself; all that he is and all that he has. He holds nothing back. Jesus redefines triumph through the life he lived and the death he offered. Where triumph for us might look like escaping vulnerability, risk, and suffering, triumph for Jesus means entering into the world and embracing vulnerability, risk, and suffering. He enters the very places we would avoid and reveals God’s transformative presence, healing, life, and love.

To the extent we cloak, cover up and hide our vulnerabilities - the tender, broken, or painful places of our lives, we hinder Jesus’ triumphal entry into our lives. All people’s lives are cloaked in something – fear, anger, guilt,

regret, control and power, sorrow, perfectionism, prejudice, pride, the need for approval. All of us wear more than one cloak and each cloak we wear distances us from God and each other.

And another thing! I wonder if the palms we wave so joyfully each Palm Sunday somehow become just another cloak. It's one thing to gather every year on Palm Sunday, sing about following Jesus, wave our palms, and then go home for lunch. It's a completely different thing to put on the mind of Christ, entering and embracing the vulnerability, risk, and suffering of our world. We should be more concerned about the cloaks we wear than the palms we carry. St Luke doesn't even mention palms as a part of the triumphal entry. They're simply not a part of his story; but cloaks are.

The triumph of Palm Sunday isn't about waving our palms for Jesus. It's not even about Jesus riding into Jerusalem. The real triumph of Palm Sunday is when we throw down our cloaks before Jesus. When we throw down everything that separates us from God and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Our cloaks are the path of Jesus' triumphal entry. The true triumph of Palm Sunday is when we stand absolutely naked, vulnerable, and exposed to the triumphal entry of God's life and love, barely hanging on to the thinnest threads of faith. Then may we say, "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! Blessed is our king who comes riding into our hearts on the cloaks of humility and love. Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, the triumphant. Amen.