

At the Name of Jesus

Philippians 3:5-11

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Luke's story of Jesus is difficult to understand apart from the history of Israel. We must especially understand Israel's prophetic literature. At the point of our text in Luke's story Jesus had come to the outskirts of Jerusalem (9:51-19:27) and was prepared to enter the city. As at numerous other places in Luke's story, Jesus' words to his disciples were immediately fulfilled in the events that followed. Jesus told two of his disciples to enter a nearby village, look for a colt that had never been ridden, and bring it to him. If asked what they are doing, the disciples were to say only, "The Lord needs it" (vv. 29-32). The disciples did as they were commanded, and events unfold exactly as Jesus said they would. Like other prophets in Israel's history, Jesus had the power to predict future events.

After the disciples returned with the colt, they placed blankets on it, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 ("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") while "the multitude of the disciples" sang the words of Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD." When some Pharisees asked Jesus to silence the crowd, Jesus quoted Habakkuk 2:11 ("I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out"). For Luke, Jesus is a prophet in a

two ways: first, he fulfills what the prophets before him had said, and second, Jesus' acts and the events in his life fulfill what he had said.

Christian scholars have always recognized that the Gospels use the Old Testament offices of priest and king to describe the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. This text, like countless others in the Gospels, also uses the offices of priest and king to interpret the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is described as "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:9-10). In 1 Timothy, Jesus is referred to as "the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15).

John Calvin expanded the twofold office of priest and king to describe Jesus as the Christ and added a third office from the history of Israel—that of prophet. As the offices of priest and king are used to interpret the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, the prophetic office is used to interpret Jesus' ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem. To Calvin, Jesus is a prophet in his teaching of "perfect doctrine."

Hans Frei argues that something remarkable occurs in the Gospels' descriptions of Jesus. Luke's description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is only one of many scenes in which Luke uses prophetic material from Israel's history in order to interpret Jesus' identity. However, a subtle but important reversal takes place in the course of Luke's story. Jesus is initially interpreted in light of Israel's prophets, but as the story progresses, Jesus, in his particularity, redefines the office of prophet. Israel's prophets proclaim God's Word to Israel. They preface what they have to say to Israel with the words "Thus says the LORD" and "Hear the word of the LORD." In the Gospels, Jesus not only proclaims God's Word; he *is* God's Word. Jesus is initially interpreted as fulfilling the words of Israel's prophets; but by the time his identity is fully known in

his death and resurrection, we understand that Israel's prophets were speaking of Jesus.

The great multitude along the road into Jerusalem declares Jesus to be the one who comes in the name of the Lord and who represents heaven's peace and glory ("Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" [v. 38]). The multitude sang of peace in heaven without recognizing that Jesus is their peace. Indeed he is the peace of the world—not any peace, but the peace that only he can give—and that peace cannot be found apart from the journey that leads inexorably to Golgotha, both for him and for those that would be his disciples. (George W. Stroup)

Luke's Palm Sunday account echoes his Christmas story. When Jesus was born, the Gospel writer tells us that angels appeared to sing, "Peace on earth" (Luke 2:14). Now, as Jesus rides his colt toward Jerusalem, the people look to the sky and sing, "Peace in heaven." Heaven sings of peace on earth. Earth echoes back, "Peace in heaven." As the church gathers this day, we are caught in the crossfire of blessings.

For Luke, this is more than a slick literary detail. It is the announcement of what God makes possible in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We hear the story of Jesus approaching Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, from the spot where tradition held that the Messiah would appear. A gathering of his followers surround him, praising God with exuberant voices. They sing Psalm 118 as their song of deliverance, affirming that God will rescue God's chosen people.

For all its joyful hosannas, Palm Sunday is a day of contrasts. We hear it in the hymns, pivoting as they do between happy triumph and inevitable crucifixion. We see it in Jesus, as the ruler of the universe chooses to ride a borrowed colt. The contrast is clear in the destination, as the city that welcomes him will later scream for his blood. For now, at least, the greatest hopes for peace are hidden from those who wish for it.

We have our own contradictions, of course. Someone tells us the best way to create peace is by initiating a war. The strong are strengthened by holding off the weak. Parents confront fear by buying a handgun for the dresser drawer. Schools encourage competition over cooperation. Governments and businesses seek to win at all costs, even if it bankrupts them. Jesus rides his lowly farm animal through all of it.

So we need to ask ourselves: What are the things that make for peace? What are the things "hidden from our eyes"? We recognize that we do not know the answer. There is a kind of ignorance, not of the intellect, but of the heart. It is possible to think through a problem without committing to a solution. We can reason our way through a conflict as if it is a game of chess, and totally miss the victims. If we think ourselves superior, we will even miss ourselves.

Jesus rode no high horse, just a lowly colt. He chose to enter a deadly situation without force or protection. He gives himself freely and without reservation. This was a prophetic act, a sign of God's vulnerable love, which risks everything and promises to gain all. This is the means by which God creates peace.

Sometimes we are clueless when it comes to peace. However for those who continue to share the body and blood of Christ, it is common to say, "The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

How does each of us respond? With the words, "And also with you." (William G. Carter)

Luke 19:28-40 contains two distinct responses to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples acclaim him king and celebrate his entrance into the city that in their tradition was the point of contact between heaven and earth. However "some of the Pharisees" ask Jesus to restrain the disciples. Jesus' response affirms his disciples: God, who is able to raise up from stones children to Abraham (3:8), could make stones on the Mount of Olives cry out.

Jesus' entrance follows the plot of Zechariah 9:9: Zion's king comes to Jerusalem triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey. The disciples' acclamation comes from Psalms 118:26: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD," to which Luke adds an explicit reference to Jesus as king. However Luke also adds a comment about peace and glory. The praise of the multitude of angels in 2:14 is about peace on *earth*, and in fact Jesus bestows peace on *earth* (7:50; 8:48; 10:6). Further, the plot of Zechariah 9, which is so strongly played out in Jesus' entry, anticipates God's acts to establish peace for *Jerusalem*.

However Luke 19:38 locates peace in *heaven*. *Has* peace become otherworldly? It certainly has become complicated, because of the inability of some of Jesus' compatriots to perceive the ways that make for peace, and this portends violence and destruction (19:42-44).

How is it possible to understand the notion of peace? One clue lies in the reason that Jesus' disciples acclaim him king. They praise God for all the deeds of power that they have seen (19:37): healings, exorcisms, resuscitations of the son of the widow of Nain and of Jairus's daughter, feeding the five thousand. In the context, however, the closest deed of power has to do with Zacchaeus. As 18:25 establishes, saving a rich person is virtually impossible. Moreover, Zacchaeus is a collaborator with Rome. Unlike another rich man, who went away sad (18:23), Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus converts him, turns him around. He stops serving mammon (16:13), gives to the poor, and makes fourfold restitution for defrauding. Whereas in 18:27 for a rich man to enter God's kingdom is impossible for human beings, for God it is possible. Zacchaeus stops being a collaborator, and Jesus demonstrates his regained identity by calling him a son of Abraham. In the case of Zacchaeus, God has wrought a deed of power through Jesus, and in 19:37 Jesus' disciples praise God for

all such deeds of power. Is this the kind of divine, heavenly power that makes for peace?

Would turning around the way empires and their collaborators serve mammon rather than God be a reason to praise God and hail Jesus as a king who makes for peace? The acclamation of peace in heaven and glory in the highest should not be read only in terms of eschatology, especially for people who pray for God's kingdom to come, as in Luke 11:2. Rather, inasmuch as Jerusalem is the point of contact between heaven and earth, affirming peace in heaven should anticipate pouring out peace on earth. (Jae Won Lee)

The wild joy of the disciples and the rebuke of the Pharisees. The throng of disciples cannot contain themselves. We think of David stripped to his loincloth dancing before the ark of the Lord as it was brought into Jerusalem.

A group of Pharisees say to Jesus, "Order your disciples to stop."

Are they embarrassed by the wild, ecstatic praise? Are they trying to warn Jesus of the danger of such a demonstration? Earlier in Luke, some Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod's murderous intent: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (13:31). Were they afraid that the Roman authorities would smell insurrection and come with terrible vengeance against the nation? Probably.

Jesus' answer: The stones will cry out! Luke's Gospel alone records these thrilling, faith-filled words: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Here is faith in the sure triumph of God. There are several layers of meaning available in this phrase.

First, here is a truth too good to have its mouth shut. It may be temporarily silenced, but not for long.

Second, if disciples fall away by cowardice or complacency, God will raise up more! As John the Baptist said in his message by the Jordan: "God is able from these

stones to raise up children to Abraham" ([Luke 3:8](#)). Poet Richard Wilbur's Christmas hymn, "A stable lamp is lighted," evokes the wonder of this truth by reminding us that "every stone must cry / every stone must cry."

Third, here is an echo of the prophetic warning of Habakuk [2:9-11](#). Injustice will not long prevail. The very stones of the house built on corruption "will cry out from the wall." This meaning points to what will happen next in Luke. So we turn to [verses 41-46](#).

The lament over Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple. Since the lectionary will skip to the passion reading, the preacher may well close by including Jesus' prophetic lament and the symbolic prophetic action at the temple. This is where Jesus has been aiming since [Luke 9:51](#). His own offering of himself, even to death on the cross, must not be disassociated from his prophetic challenge to the ruling elite of his nation who were betraying Torah and God's people. God's saving work on the cross and Jesus' saving work that led to the cross need not be pitted against one another.

So here we have the vivid scene of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, who would not recognize "the things that make for peace." We have his warning of destruction to come: not one stone left upon another.

Then we have Jesus driving the money changers from the temple and saying, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." Jesus' quotation from Jeremiah makes clear his challenge to the nation's leadership: a call for righteousness and justice. A pondering of [Jeremiah 7:3-11](#) is essential.

Paul tells us in [Philippians 3:5-11](#) what kind of king, priest, prophet and savior Jesus really is:

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death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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