

Luke 19:28-40

Palm Sunday

April 4, 2004

Charred bodies hung from a bridge. A crowd all stirred up – in a frenzy. Cameras recording. Then everyone went home. The message was sent. Next will come the reaction.

I am sure that those who ambushed the four men who worked on security are hoping for an over-reaction. Some women or children caught in the cross fire. Something that will bring more of the people out in the streets ready to make up the mob. For those who murdered the four men everything they do is a tactic, designed to manipulate the enemy into actions that will play into the insurgent's hands. Something to bolster the will of the common people – something to break the resolve of the Americans.

Was Jesus doing the very same thing that day?

Certainly what happened on the day we have come to know as Palm Sunday was not simply spontaneous. Jesus, himself, started it off with the instructions he gave to the disciples. “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’

Jesus is the one who initiates this action. Surely he knew the scripture from Zechariah we read earlier - “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king come to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

It is not as if the people saw Jesus coming and went and got the colt and put him upon it – no Jesus sent for the colt – he himself set up this little parade.

Then we read: Then they brought the colt to Jesus and after throwing their cloaks on the colt they set Jesus on it. As he rode along people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 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, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus was born it was the angels who sang, “Glory to God in highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors.” Now the disciples have joined the angels in praising God and singing of peace. For had not Zechariah promised that the king who rides upon the donkey would command peace to the nations – that his dominion would be from sea to sea?

The Pharisees who were there that day, witnessing this symbolic act by Jesus and his followers said to Jesus, “Teacher order your disciples to stop.” This very political action by Jesus would bring a reaction from Rome. But Jesus would not give in to the Pharisees’ fears. He answered them, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

It is not just Jesus and Jesus’ followers who are dreaming this up – it is the one who has created all things. The one who caused a virgin to conceive and bear a son – the one who sent angels to shepherds to announce the one who would be their savior, the one whose Spirit came down as a dove upon Jesus. This king comes not by popular election but by the election of Almighty God.

And he comes to bring peace.

The one sent by God to bring peace was met with violence. In a matter of days he would suffer the violence of the state – crucifixion. The Almighty would not respond in kind. No lightning bolts from the sky would slaughter Jesus enemies – but a word asking that his executors be forgiven would come from his lips. For the peace he would bring was not a campaign promise intended to win followers but a commitment from the very heart of God.

Jesus declares peace with you. Your sin, your hostility, your violence he will suffer. Even though it means a torturous death for him – he will take all of this from you. And in return he gives you his love.

Here, take my body – all that I am – all that I have suffered – all that I have won is yours. And every other person who belongs to me is yours as well in my body.

Jesus gives his body that we might be a people dwelling in his peace. O, we must still live in a world where guns are carried, and sons and daughters are slaughtered by those who believe in the power of the sword. But Jesus calls his own not to revenge and hatred and slaughter but to justice – protection for the little ones caught in the cross fire – winning the hearts of his enemies. I am sure there were many who lined the streets that day who hoped that Jesus would bring an end to the complicatedness of life. I am sure many hoped Jesus would slaughter everyone who was not worthy of God and then rule over the world in peace. But Jesus was the one slaughtered – he invited those who belong to him to take up their cross and follow.

A mother's picture was on the front page of the PD Friday. Her son was one of the four whose bodies were dismembered and burned. Will she find peace in the killing of those who killed her son? If that is the peace she seeks she will never know peace. For their deaths will leave her no less bereft. But if she seeks peace in the one who suffered the cruelty of crucifixion he can give her new life – new hope – new joy even to those whose hope and joy lie dead.

Seek your peace in him – only in him. For he is the one sent by God for you.