

Palm Sunday

10.04.2022
By Brec Seaton

Introduction

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem marks the ending of the journey that started at the Transfiguration, and the beginning of another journey: the final week towards the cross and the resurrection. That second journey begins with the crowds worshipping Jesus and throwing their cloaks down in front of him: a recognition that his deeds have been noticed. He has the power and authority to heal the sick and to affirm the outcast. It is a moment of celebration before the brutal events of the week unfold, and before the celebration of the glorious resurrection of Christ. It is a celebration that is not understood by the disciples or the crowd. Still looking for a warrior, they worship the one they believe to be the king who has come to save them from the Romans. And yet, the actions of Jesus, riding on a colt, are the actions of the king of peace. The king who knows that power can be used and abused. The king who uses the power afforded to him for the good of the humanity he sees in those around him.

Text

Luke 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it 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!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Comment

Such is the power seen in the actions of Jesus, that when he rides into Jerusalem it is to the praise of those around him:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

It is an act of worship by those who are lining the streets, by those who are journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover. It is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. It is the last time Jesus will enter Jerusalem.

The Pharisees, meanwhile, were enraged: worried about their own status and position, and concerned that Jesus was inciting the crowd to a rebellion, they called for Jesus to stop those who worshipped him. But even if the people had stopped, such was the authority of Jesus that the stones would have cried out. And so, conflict can once again be seen between the authorities and Jesus: both holding power, but both using their power in different ways.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was regularly in conflict with those who held political or religious status in their community. Yet his use of power and his responses to the authorities were far from those of abuse and self-indulgence. Kenneth Cloke says: ‘Everyone chooses how to respond in conflict. Fundamentally, we can respond with aggression and suppression, accommodation and surrender, avoidance and apathy, compromise and conciliation, or collaboration and dialogue. Each of these options results in a qualitatively different form of community and a different approach to resolving conflict.’^[1]

The people who worshipped Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were the same people who had witnessed his call to social justice, his feeding of the hungry, his passion for the outcast. In this final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus makes a statement about the use of power by riding on a colt – a young male horse that had yet to be ridden. Traditionally, Roman leaders would travel on a horse that had never been ridden as a symbol of their status and importance. Jesus chose a young colt to ride into Jerusalem where he would face the authorities for one last time – an animal that had yet to be ridden, but an animal without the power and authority of the adult horse. His actions showed that he was coming as a renowned leader, a king, but a king of peace. Luke uses the words ‘Peace in Heaven’, rather than Hosannah – possibly because his readers were Gentiles rather than Jews.

Jesus used his power in the gospels not for the sake of aggression and suppression, but for the sake of people – he noticed people and their humanity. To reconcile,

says Lederach, 'begins with a quality of presence that turns into compassion.'^[2] The key to this presence is to notice the humanity in another, especially those who are most invisible and neglected.^[3] Jesus noticed people's humanity, not their position, status or authority. He looked beyond a person's role or lack of it, their economic position or lack of it. He purposefully moved toward those who were untouchable, towards the outcasts, towards the lowest in society. 'He was attentive to and noticed the sacred quality of personhood.'^[4]

As he rode into Jerusalem, people noticed the humanity *and* the kingship of Jesus. They placed their cloaks on the colt and on the ground as Jesus approached: a carpet made by the people for their king. A king who looked toward people and humanity, towards peace and reconciliation, and not toward aggression and the use of power for one's own ends. 'Power is inherently adversarial and dangerous in conflict, not only because it is harmful to those it attacks, but because it is addictive and corrupting to those it protects.'^[5] As Jesus approached Jerusalem, those with power – those in authority – were the ones who panicked, who criticised, who planned to silence him.

Jesus didn't need to go to Jerusalem. He knew the dangers that lay ahead. He travelled without coercion. It was a journey that Jesus had both planned and prepared for. As we reflect on his journey into Jerusalem, a celebration of the human life of Jesus, we are mindful of the life he lived and the lives he touched. He never walked by on the other side. He gave hope where there was no hope. He took an interest in the stories of the ordinary people and those forced to live as outsiders. This is reflected in the many witnesses who turned towards Jesus on this triumphant entry into Jerusalem: the many who worshipped Jesus.

[1] Cloke, K, 2001, *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass, p140-141

[2] Lederach, J, 2014, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, Herald Press, p47

[3] Lederach, J, 2014, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, Herald Press, p47

[4] Lederach, J, 2014, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, Herald Press, p48

[5] Cloke, K, 2001, *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass, p140

Response

'We are neither called to be local heroes nor to walk by on the other side. We are nudged by the imperative of the gospel to attend to what is going on, to the complexity of the stories that are being told around us. We cannot simply live on the surface, attend to the dominant narratives, to the vigorous strains, to the

articulate and vocal. We must be mindful of the undercurrents, the sub-plot, the things that lie buried or in the dark, to the fragmented people whose lives are in bits, to the disappeared, to the lost.'[6]

You are invited to find a quiet space with a pen and paper.

Make a list, or draw, the ways in which you hold power.

- How do you use this power?
- How do you notice the humanity of those around you?
- What do you do when this power is challenged?
- How do you challenge those who use their power to abuse others?

And now make a list of the ways in which you feel powerless.

- What does this feel like?
- How can you use the power you listed above to enable those who feel powerless to find self-esteem and self-worth?

[6] Glasson, B, 2009, A Spirituality of Survival, Continuum Books, p63

Prayer

Jesus, worshipped as a king, yet in conflict with the authorities,
May I call on those in power for a more just world.

Jesus, worshipped with cloaks laid down on the path,
May I give my coat to another in need.

Jesus, who sees the humanity in me,
May I see the faces of those I meet.

Jesus, worshipped by fellow travellers who witnessed deeds of power,
May my deeds always be a witness to your power and glory.

Blessed is the king, who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! Amen.

Further Reading

Friends, this year's Easter Sunday reflection will be mailed out as usual on the previous Monday. Keep an eye out, too, for daily gospel reflections throughout holy week, available on the website.