

## Palm Sunday C (3/20/2016)

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:14-23:56

**Luke 19:28-40**

*There are two processions into Jerusalem the week of Passover, one conventional and the other unexpected. Pilate's procession resembles any imperial peacekeeping mission, but Jesus' procession anticipates the surprising manner in which God makes for peace. We wave our palms to greet a king whose authority does not rest on fear and violence, but faithfulness and sacrificial love. His will is not for self-preservation, but for peace, even at the highest personal cost.*

I wish our Processional Gospel from Luke included two more verses.

Jesus rides the final mile of his journey to Jerusalem on a colt, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy about a coming king who would speak peace to the nations.<sup>1</sup> His crowd of followers sing out a verse from Psalm 118: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" and they lay their garments on the road before him. It's a thrilling spectacle arising from Israel's heritage, Israel's hope-filled memory. The assigned Gospel ends, however, just before Jesus' famous lament over Jerusalem: "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.'"<sup>2</sup>

*The things that make for peace.* According to the conventional criteria, it would appear that Jerusalem and its ruling elite recognize quite well the

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<sup>1</sup> 9:9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 19:41-2.

things that make for peace. After all, Jesus' parade from the east is not the only procession into Jerusalem the week of Passover. From the west marches Pontius Pilate, the representative of Rome, accompanied by all the trappings of imperial power: horses, chariots, and infantry, all heavily armed and armor-clad. This procession resembles any imperial peacekeeping mission. It's an imposing presence to intimidate anyone caught up in the memory of the people's liberation at the first Passover, a force to crush any local resistance to Rome.<sup>3</sup> Political domination, military strength, the threat of reprisal – these are the things that make for peace, aren't they?

But Jesus' procession includes none of the standard symbols of royal power. He is not draped in opulence and escorted by a horde of armed protectors. Instead, his entourage is made up of unarmed, unadorned commoners, and even the animal he rides is on loan. Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem will not be met with celebration, but condemnation. And, he will not be elevated on a throne, but a cross.

In this way, Jesus' procession into Jerusalem anticipates the surprising manner in which God makes for peace. To borrow the words of one interpreter:

Jesus rides no high horse, just a lowly colt. He chooses to enter a deadly situation without force or protection. He gives himself freely and without reservation. This is a prophetic act, a sign of God's vulnerable

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<sup>3</sup> Borg and Crossan, paraphrased by H. Stephen Shoemaker, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 153.

love, which risks everything and promises to gain all. This is the means by which God creates peace.<sup>4</sup>

Dear church, **we wave our palms to greet a king whose authority does not rest on fear and violence, but faithfulness and sacrificial love. His will is not for self-preservation, but for peace, even at the highest personal cost.** It's a peace that we cannot achieve with more political control, more intimidation, more crucifixion, but that **transforms the violence in our hearts.** The peace of God passes all earthly understanding, all earthly promises of peace that rely on the sword, and instead guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus,<sup>5</sup>

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

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<sup>4</sup> William G. Carter, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 4:7.