



March 28, 2021

Making Room for Cries of Hosanna

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Luke 19:29-44 NRSV

²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "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. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As 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, ³⁸saying,

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

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

⁴¹As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴²saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our creator and from Jesus, the blessed one who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

In April of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. sat in a Birmingham, AL jail. He had been arrested for non-violent direct action aimed at breaking racial segregation in the city. His white clergy colleagues criticized him with letters and editorials in local papers, calling his activities "unwise and untimely". They called him an outsider, coming from Atlanta to Birmingham to lead marches and boycotts.



In response to his critics, King wrote, *“I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea...”* You may deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that have brought about the demonstrations.”

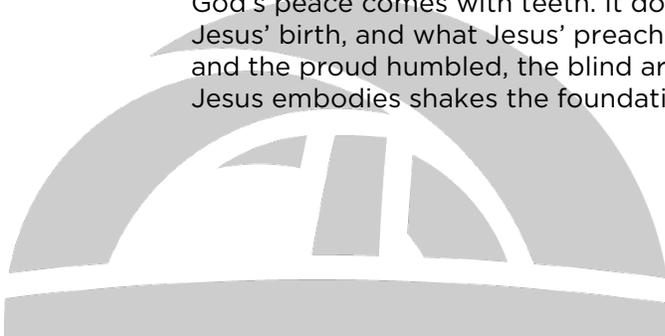
As Jesus came into Jerusalem with poise and purpose, the religious types saw Jesus’ arrival as “unwise and untimely”. The crowds of people cried out the familiar verses of Psalm 118, as they paraded into town with him, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”. But this time, those verses were not just recalling the Passover remembrance of their ancestors’ journey from slavery to freedom. These cries of “Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the Lord!” were for Jesus. To the Pharisees standing by observing, this didn’t look like a ritual, it looked like a revolution.

“Teacher, order your disciples to stop!”, they said. “Do not let them disrupt the “real” festivities. Don’t let their cries disturb the status quo. Keep their cries for real justice silent. It is uncomfortable. Things are getting out of control. We just want peace, let’s not make trouble. Please just make them stop.”

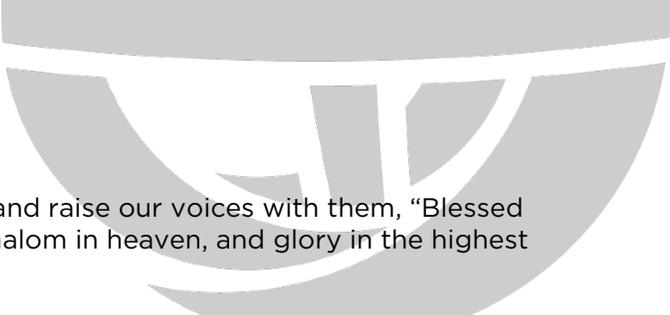
Similar objections have been raised throughout history when disadvantaged people raise their voice and tell the world what they need. And when their voices are finally heard, there is often retribution rather than recognition. Last fall, when citizens of Georgia, who were predominantly black or poor organized to get out the vote, it changed the political landscape for that state. This week, those who before opposed those voices chose to retaliate and change the laws so that it will be harder for black and poor voters to exercise their right to be heard at the ballot box yet again. “Just make them stop!” they have cried. They’re making us uncomfortable. For some, even acknowledging the cries of these people seems to be too much to bear. Power and privilege can make it difficult to understand the experience of those living under systems of oppression, no matter where or when it happens. It is easier to create peace on one’s own terms rather than make room for peace for others.

Jesus is not interested in this top-down understanding of peace. What the Pharisees, and others with power are looking for is compliance with the status quo. They are looking for these nameless people to fall into line and let the “real” leaders continue to tell them what peace looks like. But this is not of God. If it were, Jesus had no reason to be in Jerusalem. There would be no triumphal entry, no cloaks on the ground, no shouts of praise for their anointed king.

Jesus’ peace looks and acts differently. His peace makes room for the cries of the nameless people. It sees that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. The peace Jesus comes to bring is *shalom* - fullness, the kind of peace that provides everything needed to everyone to be whole and fully themselves. At the same time, this peace comes with a cost. It is a peace that is fully dependent on the presence and awareness of God. No amount of power or prestige, no illusions of control compare with this kind of peace. And for shalom to take root in one’s life, they’ll need to lay down the illusions of power and control. And that is what makes it so threatening to those who do not recognize the time of God’s visitation.



God’s peace comes with teeth. It does not placate the powerful. It fulfills what Mary sang about at Jesus’ birth, and what Jesus’ preached in his first public ministry. The lowly are being raised up, and the proud humbled, the blind are seeing, and the captive are being freed. The shalom that Jesus embodies shakes the foundations of the world, if only we see ourselves in the nameless



faces of that crowd. If only we see Jesus coming as king, and raise our voices with them, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace – shalom in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

Palm Sunday is not about hope in what Jesus may become at some point in the future. It is confirmation of what and who Jesus is – the prince of peace, the king who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the embodiment of God’s visitation. Yet, that will come with a cost too, right? Because not everyone sees Jesus as those nameless people on the road. Not everyone will stick with him when they see what price it will cost to bring God’s shalom. The ridicule will turn hostile, and the questions will turn to indictments which will lead to capital injustice - death.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he seemed convinced that this peace he brought would have its consequences in order for it to be fulfilled. But Jesus was resolute. He understood that his shalom would bring about heaven’s peace. Frederick Buechner wrote, “***for’ Jesus’ peace’ seems’ to’ have’ meant’ not’ the’ absence’ of’ struggle’ but’ the’ presence’ of’ love.***” And that is what sets Jesus’ peace apart from any peace we receive elsewhere – it is rooted in love. It is why there is room for the cries of the people, why there is room when we are let down, why there is room when we’ve messed up, and room for unexpected kindness. Jesus’ willingness to face those who cannot see him for who he truly is shows us that we belong to a God who loves without limits. So raise your voice this week, shout your hosannas. Find yourself among the nameless disciples in the crowd who cry out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Jesus comes as king to make room for our cries of praise and our cries for help. “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Perhaps you want to cry out for the children on the border who seek asylum and a chance at life, and at the same time are spoken about as criminals rather than innocent victims of violence and poverty. Or maybe you see systems that are breaking the spirit of people you care for closer to home. Perhaps your spirit is being broken by a toxic situation at work or your family is a mess, and you don’t know what to do. Jesus makes room for those cries too. You may hear your voice in these shouts or you have your own shouts of hosannas held in your heart. You may also hear the objections of those who just want to maintain status quo. But that is not the way of God. As God’s beloved people who follow the one who comes in the name of the Lord, we are, as Dr. King put it, “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Jesus comes to show us that our struggle is Jesus struggle, and others’ struggles are our struggles. God designed the world to relate to one another as this great “network of mutuality”, woven together by the struggle for God’s holy shalom. That shalom is coming and is indeed here. Let it be so for us. Amen.

