

Luke 19: 29-44

I am sorry to tell you that yesterday when Patti drove all over delivering palms, what she meant to deliver was cloaks. Did you notice that in the reading? There are no palms in Luke. The people spread their *cloaks* on the road for the donkey to tread on. And why is that? Apparently, a couple hundred years earlier when the Jewish rebels, the Maccabees, had risen up and briefly gained independence for Judea, the people had waved palms to welcome the conquerors. Palms have a certain political resonance. Luke must have ditched the palms and substituted cloaks because he does want to portray Jesus as making a kingly entrance to Jerusalem, but he wants to emphasize the *cosmic* kingliness of Jesus rather than the *political* kingliness. There's lots more cosmic resonance in this story, with the stones crying out and so forth.

Jesus in this story knows exactly what's going to happen. He knows where the donkey is and what the disciples should say in order to get it. He knows what to expect from Jerusalem; indeed, he already wept over Jerusalem a little earlier, when he said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets . . . how often have I wanted to embrace you as a hen shelters her chicks, and you would not!" This time he says to the city, "If you had only recognized . . . the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." And he goes on to predict—accurately—that the day will come when Jerusalem's enemies (as it turns out, the Romans) will crush the city to the ground "because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

"If you had only recognized the things that make for peace!" I think we have to understand Jesus as speaking to the city as an entity in itself, not as the collection of individuals

who live there, because those people are among those Judeans who are suffering from poverty and lack of opportunity. He's chastising the city as an organization, if you will. The city, as it functions, has not recognized the things that make for peace—and those things, if you recall earlier in Luke, are not complicated. Right before Jesus' baptism and commencement of his public life, John the Baptist had issued a call for repentance. People flocked to him and asked what they should do to escape the wrath that was to come, and John told them, "People who have two coats should share with those who have none . . . tax collectors should collect just what's required and not more; soldiers shouldn't extort money from civilians." It's basic good behavior—what my kids' elementary teachers used to call "sidewalk skills." It's not rocket science. But Jerusalem as a city has not followed that simple guidance, and neither have we in our society.

We know the things that make for peace, but the systems we've developed for running our society make them very difficult to do. I talked recently about Heather McGhee's book *The Sum of Ourselves*, and how she shows how racism impelled towns across the country to fill in their public swimming pools rather than allow them to be de-segregated. Having nice public parks with well-maintained recreational facilities IS a small thing that makes for peace, but we have not invested sufficiently in public goods because we didn't want the wrong people to benefit from them. Redlining because of racism created poor neighborhoods that then could not fund their neighborhood schools adequately. We know the things that make for peace, but we don't do them because of systems that were set up to enforce inequality.

Jesus says that Jerusalem has failed to recognize the things that make for peace, and so it will be destroyed. Meanwhile, as the celebration of his arrival gets noisy, the Pharisees try to

shush the disciples for fear that they will attract the attention of the Romans. The Romans are already jumpy because it's Passover, which is always a powder keg—a celebration of Israel's liberation from the oppression of a foreign empire is not ever going to look good for Rome. But Jesus tells the Pharisees, "If these were silent, the stones would shout." This is bigger than the politics of Judea and Rome.

Jesus comes into Jerusalem like a king, but like a servant king. He enters the city on a mount, as Pilate does, but from the opposite end of the city than Pilate, and on a young donkey rather than a battle horse. He brings no weapons, but he accepts the tender ministrations of the people who pave his way with their own clothes. He's presenting himself as a king, but a king whose hallmarks are humility and gentleness.

And that can be real. Sometimes a city does rise to the moment and embrace the things that make for peace. Recently the city of Stockton California completed a two-year experiment in which 125 people living in neighborhoods at or below Stockton's median household income received an unconditional monthly stipend of \$500, which is a radically simple solution to the problem of poverty—a non-rocket science solution, if you will. The first objection to a guaranteed basic income is usually that it will incentivize people not to work—that it will create a dependency and actually undermine the recipients' character. That was not what Stockton found out. In fact, full-time employment rose among those who received the guaranteed income and their financial, physical and emotional health improved. You want to know what people did with an extra \$500 a month? Mekie, a mother of six, says,

"I've been able – my son wanted to go to a football camp – I was able to pay for that. So he got to go. I was able to buy him some new shoes. I was able to give him money so he wouldn't be hungry when he was at his track meet when he would go out of town. It was basically for them.

It's basically, it's all about them. Then I was able to – things got a little easier. So my car payments are on time now. So it's better. Rent's been getting better.”

Jovan, a construction worker with three kids whose wife is a social worker, said,

“One of our vehicles broke down. It need a head gasket. So that was pretty expensive and it helped to have the extra \$500...[otherwise] the car would have just been sitting until we were able to save enough to fix it, in the meantime still making the monthly car payment and everything else...it would have made it a whole lot difficult to get to work. I work out of town so I wouldn't have been able to get dropped off and [my wife] wouldn't have been able to go to work if I have to take the car.”

His wife was able to work because they had the extra money.

And Tomás, a factory worker with a wife and two kids, connected the lifting of financial stress to an ability to relax when he was with his family instead of worrying about money and hustling. They had lost a daughter, and it used to be that when he had time off to be with family, he'd be stressed about money and in his low mood he'd grieve his daughter, and he couldn't make the most of the family time. He found that when he had less to worry about financially, he was also able to enjoy his family and the loss of his daughter, though always painful, didn't take over his mind.

The city of Stockton's experiment was an experiment in the things that make for peace, and the takeaway is that people knew what they needed and their suffering was alleviated when they were given what they cried out for. It violates some political orthodoxy, but new information should make us re-think old orthodoxies.

Clearly Luke's Jesus is not interested in getting caught up in the dispute between the Roman Empire and the partisans of an old Jewish dynasty. But at the same time, he takes seriously the yearnings of the people, and he does not shut them down but lets them welcome him as a king whom they understand to be a messiah descended from David. Jesus knows what

lies ahead for him in Jerusalem, but he also knows that the kingship bestowed on him by God is cosmic, and that it can't be nullified or neutralized by political forces.

Another world is possible. That was the slogan on the UCC desk calendar a couple years ago, and I think that's where Jesus is pointing us as he enters Jerusalem triumphantly. It *is* possible to do the things that make for peace. It *is* possible to make a difference in people's lives by giving them \$500 a month with no strings attached. It is possible to reduce police violence against people of color. It is possible to educate all our children. But we have to get past the spurious objections that are based on a scarcity mentality or racism or a fear of losing influence, and respond to the cries of the people where they are, as Jesus did.

Luke shows Jesus as sort of above the particular political parties of his day—not wanting to be identified with the Zealots' movement or whatever movement was going to replace Caesar with the new David. But at the same time, Jesus takes the needs of the people with utter seriousness. Those are “the things that make for peace,” and he knows that those things are actually possible if the will exists to make them happen.

It is not the place of the church to identify with one partisan or another. But it is our place to advocate for the things that make for peace. If we try to ignore the cries of the people, or shut them down because they're attracting the wrong kind of attention or they're offending “nice people” with their loudness and rudeness and sometimes inaccurate attributions of responsibility, the very stones will cry out in their place. Jesus rode into Jerusalem with a pretty good idea that what awaited him was not good. And yet he knew that God heard the cries of the poor and was answering them with him. We now need to be Jesus' Body--the community that answers the cries of the poor, but that does not pick up the sword or identify

our opponents as the antichrist. We can lay down our palms—our partisan symbols—as the church, but carry the insistence that another world is possible. In a cosmos that is ruled by the God of Jesus, the things that make for peace are entirely do-able.

Hosanna, King,

Blessed are you, our king, who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! Even if our voices were silenced, creation itself would rise up to praise you!

Hosanna in the Highest! Amen.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/04/973653719/california-program-giving-500-no-strings-attached-stipends-pays-off-study-finds>

<https://www.stocktondemonstration.org/participant-stories/zohna>