

Luke 19: 28-40 Parades

Don't we all love parades. Today crowds still gather along parade routes but since the most notable are televised we can enjoy the spectacle from the comfort of home. Millions view them. Parades represent excitement and often anticipation about a coming event. We have the Macy's Day parade at Thanksgiving anticipating the Christmas season. There's the Rose Bowl parade which celebrates either the New Year or our dedication to college football. To us these parades are only fun filled celebratory events. Throughout history parades have been used for celebrations. Parades have been the means of celebrating victories—whether of returning war heroes or more recently, returning victorious athletic teams. Ancient cultures were no different. Parades were celebratory events but they also were demonstrations of power which carried a message to those observing them. Carved friezes on buildings in Rome show the victorious Roman armies returning with the spoils taken from the conquered. The Egyptians and Greeks also used depictions of parades to convey their power and might. Parades then were not just celebrations but political statements. It is into that understanding of parades that our scriptures speak today. It is into the tension between kingship in this world and the kingship of God that we have the description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The passage from Luke this morning moves us into the events of Holy Week. Our passage begins with "after he said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." Jesus has "set his face toward Jerusalem" with all that it will entail much earlier in Luke's narrative. He has told the disciples what will happen, that he must die and be raised. As he made his way to Jerusalem he continued teaching and healing. When previous chapter ends he has been in Jericho near Jerusalem, his final destination. The Jewish Passover observance is beginning. Jesus and his disciples join with the many pilgrims who come to Jerusalem for this celebration. Passover recalls God's deliverance of their people from an oppressive slavery under the Egyptians. They compare it to their current situation from which they hope to find deliverance. As the pilgrims gathered, Rome also prepared for this time. Rome preserved its control over various nations by stationing garrisons in major cities; by making examples of rebels, arresting and executing them publically on wooden crosses. Israel had a Roman military governor, Pontius Pilate and a Jewish puppet king, Herod, who served Rome not his people. Both were hated as oppressors. As these pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem, hope for liberation from the occupying empire grew, rumors flew, and secret plans for revolution were hatched. Many Jews looked for the arrival of the promised Messiah, a kingly person anointed by God to bring them freedom. The Peace of Rome was an uneasy reality enforced by harsh measures from those in charge. In preparation for the Passover gathering of people in Jerusalem, the Roman governor comes to town. Pilate's normal residence was not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea Maritima, on the Mediterranean Sea. But in a show of power he descends upon Jerusalem for this time of religious observance. Near Passover, he enters Jerusalem's main city gates on a warhorse, traveling in an impressive procession of horses and men, decked with glinting swords, Roman shields and imperial red uniforms. Jesus and his disciples also prepared to enter Jerusalem for the Passover. Not by sharpening weapons and gathering forces, but by staging their own procession into town. Jesus has arrived at the Mount of Olives which overlooks Jerusalem and a minor entrance. Jesus begins his preparation for his entry into the city by giving very specific directions to his disciples telling them: "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.” These details are very important because they resonate with the words of the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah told Zion to rejoice because her king would come to her on a colt, the foal of a donkey. This was a vision describing the one who would deliver them and have dominion from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. In the prophet’s words was a vision for peace and a release from captivity. These words were preserved and talked about by many rabbis. Those gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover would have known Zechariah’s words. They also have either heard of or seen this man Jesus as he restored the sick to health and taught with authority. The witnesses to Jesus’ ministry had expectations. They were anticipating God’s anointed one who would deliver them as their ancestors had been delivered. The fact that the Roman governor came to Jerusalem at this particular time was a sign that not just the Jewish authorities, but also Roman ones were aware of the people’s unrest; of the people’s longing for rescue from Roman rule. So when Jesus plans his entry in the particular way that he did, it was an announcement—the Messiah has arrived. Jesus knew that Jerusalem was a dangerous place to go. Yet Jesus plans this parade for his entry. He chooses this time to make his claim known. All along as we read the narratives of Jesus’ life he had been cautious about telling anyone that he was God’s anointed one, chosen to bring blessing and peace. Now as he nears his arrest and death, Jesus is letting every Jew in Jerusalem in on that secret. Here comes the Messiah, riding on a donkey, just as the prophet said he would do. That’s one reason for this whole preplanned show that Jesus orchestrates. This proclamation staged at this particular time when Jerusalem was a tinderbox of revolutionary fervor. That point is clear in each account of this entry, but Jesus was also demonstrating something very different as well. When Jesus rides into the city announcing that he is the Messiah he enters not on a warhorse like the Roman governor, but on a borrowed donkey. Additionally, if you read Luke carefully when the disciples bring that donkey to Jesus, they spread cloaks upon its back and set Jesus there. Then they begin their parade down from the Mount of Olives. As he rode along, the disciples spread their cloaks on the road. Verse 37: As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives the whole multitude of the disciples began praising God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen.” Here there is no mention of psalm branches. It is not the citizens of Jerusalem who are shouting, but the increasing multitude of those who after witnessing Jesus’ deeds are following Jesus into the city. In his parade, Jesus has no swords or shields, no flags or banners—just a procession of disciples throwing their cloaks on the ground as he passes. They shout: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! Jesus’ entry is enacting a parody of the imperial power which has entered the city with its own parade. Although he is claiming his authority as the Messiah, he is also demonstrating that the power he holds is not at all the kind of power exercised by the Roman occupiers. As it turns out, it is also not the kind of power that anyone expected in a Messiah. Jesus, throughout his ministry had demonstrated that he had power; power which he was using to make the peace of God a reality, to heal and restore. There are many types of power and ways power can be used. As a wandering rabbi from Galilee, Jesus didn’t have legitimate power recognized by Rome or Jerusalem. Once, we are told when a village wouldn’t welcome him and his disciples, the disciples wanted to destroy it by calling down fire from heaven. Jesus explained to them that was not the way he worked. Jesus refused to use coercive power. When James and John ask for favored positions when he came into his kingdom, Jesus refused

to make promises of rewards. He didn't use the power of rewards. Instead, Jesus taught the word of God, healed and inspired loyalty. This power might be called charismatic. Jesus wanted to bring peace, but in contrast to the government he lived and died under, he would not do it with a sword. In Jesus, divine power had less to do with force and more to do with love, knowledge and loyalty. Jesus exercised his power carefully, not simply for himself and his tribe, but for the good of the world. In the disciples joyful shouts there is an echo of the song the angels sang at his birth: "Peace on Earth. Glory to God in the highest heaven." In this parade the disciples who have experienced the saving presence and power of Jesus recognize him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. This is the Prophet, Priest and King who has come to save. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states through questions 23-26: Christ the prophet reveals to us the will of God for our salvation, as priest he offers himself up to satisfy divine judgment, as king he subdues us to himself, ruling and defending us, conquering all his and our enemies. All of this is either present or foreshadowed in Luke's triumphant entry. When the disciples, multitudes of them, raise their voices in joyful recognition of the saving work which Christ has come to do. When some Pharisees in the crowd tell Jesus that he should silence his disciples, Jesus' response is "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." The immediate future is not bright. Weeping, betrayal, and denial are all on the horizon, and yet, the ultimate future is sure. Forgiveness, reconciliation and the reign of God are relentlessly on the way. We humans are rather easily dazzled by money, prestige, title, connections, political clout, military force—all the world's obvious kinds of power. But Jesus' whole ministry, culminating in this procession into Jerusalem humbly on the back of a borrowed donkey suggests that God's power lies not in the obvious. God's power is most often revealed where we least expect. As a passage we read recently from Isaiah told us God's ways are not our ways. So on this Palm Sunday, since Luke gives us a multitude of disciples laying down cloaks instead of waving palms what message do we find? Given the political and social climate of the day, I think the message for us might be that like those disciples, we too cannot be silent. We need to shout out our witness the message of Christ; to testify to what God is doing in our world. We need to join with those disciples who lined Jesus' pathway on that day. Like they laid down their cloaks, we give of what we have. Like them we are not to be silent but calling attention to what God has done and is still doing among us. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.