

Palm Sunday
April 14, 2019
Luke 19:28-44
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28After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 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.”

“Hark, the herald angels sing: Glory to the new born king! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.” Remember that? Christmas wasn't that long ago was it? Do you remember standing here and singing your favorite carols, hearing the birth story as Luke tells it, of the angels singing, of angels “bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold, Peace on earth, good will to all, from heaven's all gracious king, the world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.” I love all that, don't you? And so much of the story of Jesus' birth, so much of what we love, comes from Luke's gospel: the angel's visit to Mary, the journey to Bethlehem, the birth in the stable and laying him in a manger because there was no room in the inn, and the angelic announcement to the shepherds with the heavenly host proclaiming “Peace on earth, good will to all.” Luke tells us all that. So why does he change it now? Why does he change the song? Did you notice? When the angels praise God they say, “Peace on earth.” When the crowd praises God, they say, “Peace in heaven.” Why does the song change? Is it peace on earth or peace in heaven?

I suppose it depends on who is speaking, doesn't it? And maybe it depends on an individual's experience of peace. Where does peace happen? How does peace happen? I'm sure I noticed this change in Luke's song this year because back in January, I pick a star on Epiphany that says “Peace.” That's my word for the year. And I've been thinking about it. When do we experience peace? If I were to ask you to describe a peaceful moment, what would you say? When I was 23 and was home for the summer I decided that I wanted to climb one of the peaks in Colorado that goes over 14,000 feet. Most of those were just long day hikes, but they weren't easy. So I decided one Friday to hike up Gray's Peak which is the tallest peak on the Continental Divide. None of my friends could go with me so I went up alone. It wasn't easy and there were times I

almost talked myself into turning back, but I got to the summit and sat and rested and looked over the spectacular vistas of the Divide and then looked to the side and there about 10 feet away was a mountain goat, pure white coat, and her two kids, just eating lichen off the rocks and looking at me like they wondered what I was doing there. And the goat looked at her kids as if to say, “Don’t worry about him, all’s well.” And I just sat there and felt at peace. Eugene Peterson in his translation of Luke, renders this passage as “All's well in heaven.” That's how I felt at that moment, all's well. This is how it is supposed to be. There have been plenty of other times too, for which I feel fortunate and grateful. Sitting with Kendall in the rocking chair when she was an infant, her head tucked into my neck, wondering if she really has to grow up. Falling asleep in the arms of the one you love. Sitting around the Thanksgiving table when all your family is there. Walking into the darkened sanctuary any Sunday morning knowing that this is the place where we gather to meet with God. Even sitting here in the sanctuary at 1:00 in the morning praying, thinking, wondering what to pray about, but then hearing the words of Jesus, “Could you not stay awake with me one hour?” and thinking to myself, “Yes, I can do that.” Peace. Where is it for you? Where does peace happen? And don’t you wish that could happen all the time?

Maybe that's why the crowd proclaims “Peace in heaven,” because they imagine the peace that exists in heaven and they want that for themselves on earth. Because they don't really experience that in Jerusalem during those days. Certainly during that Passover week Jerusalem was anything but peaceful. There were people from all over who had come to the city for the festival. Some scholars estimate that there could have been close to two million people who were packed into the city that week. And the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate was there also. He normally didn’t live in Jerusalem, but during festivals like this, he and his troops would be there to help

keep the peace. Peace again. The Romans valued peace. The Pax Romana, the Roman Peace, was the peace of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean world. The Romans wanted their empire to be peaceful. But to them, peace meant quiet. It meant no rebellions. It meant you paid your taxes and you did what they said and they pretty much left you alone. To the Romans, peace meant the absence of conflict. And to get that peace, they kept a large army in Jerusalem to impose the Pax Romana. Is that what we mean by peace? The absence of conflict, or do we mean something more? The crowds shouted for Peace in heaven. They wanted something more than they had on earth. This Roman imposition of order wasn't the way things were supposed to be. All was not well.

And so here comes Jesus. Maybe he will be a leader that will get rid of the Romans. He comes in riding on a donkey, the traditional symbol of the coming of the Messiah, God's chosen leader. Maybe he will be the one to bring peace, to give them their country back, to make things as they are supposed to be. And so they shout, "Peace in heaven. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Bring us peace. When the crowd shouts for peace, it is a prayer for peace. Not so the angels. Remember at Jesus's birth the angels cried out Peace on earth. That wasn't a prayer, it was an announcement. Peace has come to the earth. Because the angels recognize that peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is making things right, turning things around to how they are supposed to be, but peace isn't the absence of something, it is the presence of something. When you thought about those peaceful moments in your life, it is not as if all your problems went away. Peace isn't an emptiness; it is a fullness. Peace is not the absence of conflict or problems, it is the presence of Christ. When the angels sing of Peace on earth, they can do so because of the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem. Peace has come to earth, in the person of Jesus. The angels song is an announcement. Where Christ is, peace comes.

Today, if you are in Jerusalem and are on the Mount of Olives and you walk down the mount toward the city as Jesus and his disciples did that day, you will see the old city with its ancient walls and the famous golden dome of the Rock. But as you walk down the path you will come to a strange shaped little chapel, the church of Dominus Fleuit, which is Latin for “the Lord wept.” This teardrop shaped church is where before he rode into the city, Jesus stopped and wept over Jerusalem, because they “did not know the things that make for peace, they did not recognize the time of their visitation from God.” The crowds pray for peace, the angels announced peace, and Jesus weeps for peace because the people look for peace in the wrong places. They want military victories, they want punishment for the Romans, they want themselves to have power, thinking that those things will bring them peace. And so Jesus weeps. But are we so different? The crowd sees Jesus come into the city and they are excited. Do they want a Jesus who is a suffering servant or a conquering king? What do we want? Do we want a God who will promise that if we are faithful, if we pray enough, if we believe hard enough we will have a nice house, a great job, a cool car, all the best friends, a healthy life, and worship will always be happy, happy, happy. When we come, that is. Those are not the things that make for peace. Peace is the presence of Christ in our lives. Peace is not the absence of conflict or the presence of things. It is when all is well because we are becoming the people God has made us to be. Jesus didn’t come to give us power in an earthly sense, he didn’t come to justify our causes, he didn’t come to help us to win our battles, he came to save us. He came to make us new. He came that we might follow him. Christ is our peace. Whether you knew it or not, those moments of peace in your life are the moments that your eyes and ears and spirit were open to the ongoing presence of Christ. Peace in heaven, peace on earth.