

Act One

Palm Sunday Year C

Luke 19:28-40

In every classic story, every great play, there are three acts. Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is Act One. On Palm Sunday, as Jesus walks into Jerusalem, he is walking into struggle, conflict, suffering, injustice, grief, pain, loss and betrayal. On the surface we see the joyous and triumphal entry. Alongside that hope and joy is the grim reality:

- Jerusalem is occupied by the Roman Army to keep the peace during the feast of Passover.
- Pilate, the brutal Roman governor, is in charge.
- King Herod is a corrupt, brutal, and weak, puppet ruler who relies on keeping Rome happy to maintain his tenuous hold on power.
- The Temple authorities have an awkward agreement with the Romans to allow them to continue worshiping as Jews and not as pagans, worshiping the Emperor as God.

So, what does Jesus do? He stages this triumphal procession into the capital of Israel, using the symbolic images of Israel's new King entering the city. He announces himself as Lord – as messiah – in direct challenge to the High Priest. He has people chanting and singing that he is the new king, sent by God, in direct confrontation to the authority of Herod and of Rome.

The Pharisees can see clearly what all this means, or at least, what Jesus is doing, and they once again warn him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop. You are going to cause a revolution. You are going to get yourself killed!” And Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Jesus knows what he is doing. He knows where he is going. He knows what he will find there. He knows what will happen. Jesus is going to the epicenter of it all:

- He is going to the center of Roman oppression.
- He is going to the capital of religious and economic persecution.
- He is confronting the exploitation and corruption of Herod.
- He is walking into the place where he will lose all his closest friends, and where he will be arrested, humiliated, and executed.

Jesus, the Messiah, who is God's love incarnate, goes into the center of oppression, suffering, corruption, exploitation, loss and grief. Into all this goes Jesus, the Christ, wearing only a robe, with no sword or army.

This is Act One.

Act Two belongs to Caiaphas and Pilate. Act two belongs to the powers of this world. At the end of this service today we will hear the reading of the Passion; the arrest, trial and murder of Jesus; but that is Act Two.

This triumphal entry, with the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and King is Act One. That is where we are now. In Act One, there is hope. God has sent a savior, Jesus, the Christ, and he has marched right up to the powers of this world and declared that their rule is over. Their time has ended. Now is the time for God's Kingdom.

And at the end of this opening act, Jesus gives us a sign. We all know what is to come. Jesus knew too. He warned his followers that he would be arrested, tried and killed. Act Two is going to be horrible. But, when the Pharisees warn Jesus away from all this, he gives us a sign that Act Two is not the end of the story.

Jesus has not come merely to confront the political and religious powers. He has come to bring God's love to all of creation. He is more than a teacher, more than a prophet, more than a king. When the Pharisees warn him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop!" Jesus replies with a sign, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Even the stones are rejoicing. Jesus has come to save all of creation. Remember this as we enter the darkness of Act Two.

Act Three is coming.

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