

“Triumph with Tears”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

A Reflection for Palm Sunday

Luke 19.28-48

April 5, 2020

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[by clicking here.](#)

A couple days ago, someone asked me what we'd be doing for Palm Sunday this year. I said what I thought would be happening, the sorts of things we would be doing, and how we'd be trying this year to adapt and make the best of it.

I did not mention that we would be engaging in some explosive political theatre. Or, at least that Jesus would.

Don't let the donkey fool you. Or our Palm Sunday hymns; many of them tell of children playing, laughing, and singing. Or our branches waving in the air. Or the parade. (When all this is over, how about a big parade!)

What Jesus is doing is explosive.

In the Scripture story, we get a strong sense that he has thought this all through.

Even the donkey. *“Its master needs it.”* I don't think it was Jesus' donkey. No, that sounds to me like a pre-arranged code-phrase, in a top-secret undercover operation. It's like Jesus has arranged for the donkey to be smuggled in, left there, then retrieved at the right time. *“When two men come to get it, you'll know they're from me because they will say this to you: ‘Its master needs it.’”*

Jesus knows what he is about to do. And, what he will be bringing down upon himself.

I doubt even his tears surprise him.

II

Then the parade started.

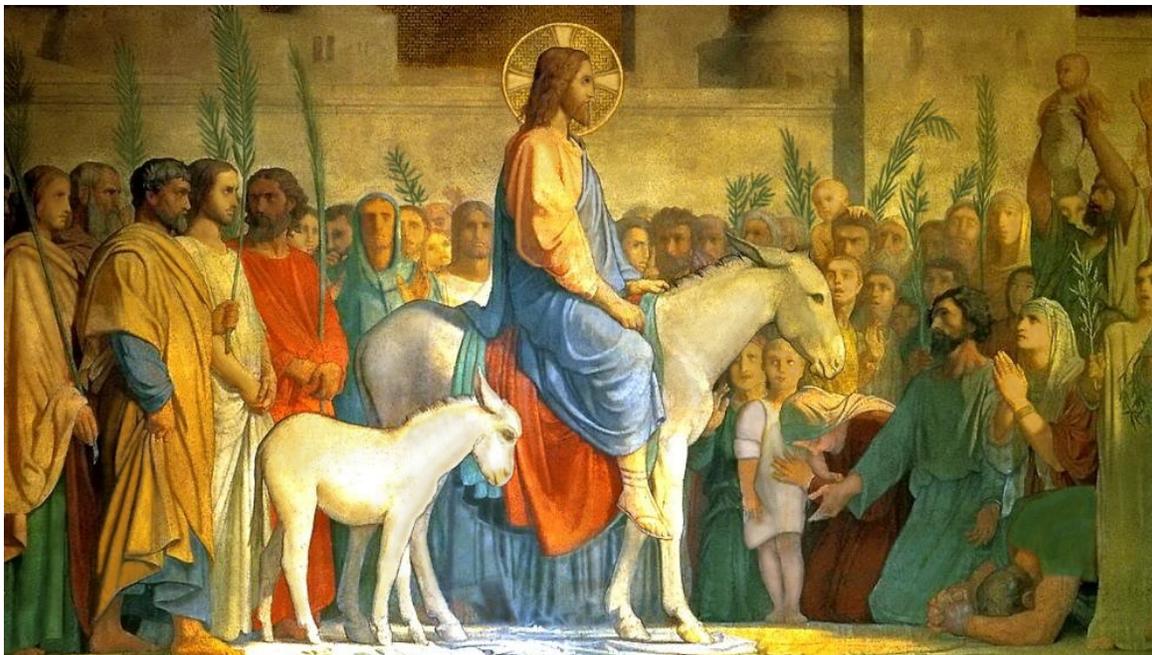
The city was already tense. Passover was coming, so pilgrims were pouring in. Passover is about freedom from oppression, national liberation, and God the King stepping in to get God's People back. Well in those days they were not free, they were oppressed, liberation was their long-awaited longing, and generations had been crying to God to set things right, but nothing changed.

Now comes Jesus, riding on a donkey. Right away they're remembering the prophet Zechariah:

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion.
Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.
Look, your king will come to you.
He is righteous and victorious.
He is humble and riding on a donkey. . . .*¹

Jesus knows what he is doing. He is the king, coming.

Artists have delighted to tell this scene. Like this painting by Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin.²



It gives me a feeling of the weight of the moment. The crowd is hushed and still. It's tense with expectation, and pleading with hope. To the right is a dad, holding his infant high, as if he'll later say, *"You won't remember it, but you were there that day, when God's king claimed back his throne."*

I like the painting, but I'm sure the scene was much wilder. A chaotic disorder of excitement. Those folks were fired up and letting loose. It's no wonder some wanted Jesus to tone it down. How will the authorities react to such a wild mob?

¹ Zechariah 9:9.

² *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* by Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin (1846). Public domain.

But Jesus knows there is no holding back. Maybe the artist got Jesus' face exactly right: serious, determined, even sombre.

III

Then, they are in the Temple. Again, more political theatre. Jesus knows what he's doing, and knows what people will think of it. He's sending a message.

The Temple, this place for worshipping God, has become a carnival of corruption. This font of blessing for all people has been twisted into a tool of nationalistic pride. This sanctuary of peace is now used to harbour the seeds of violence.

God's House needs a good cleaning out. This is what God's true King does. So Jesus begins. He's saying, *"This is what I've come to do, to set things right."*

This painting by van Hemessen captures the chaos of the moment.³ Basically, Jesus has started a riot.



³ *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* by Jan Sanders van Hemessen (1556). Public domain.

And he has sealed his fate.

Whatever else we need to say about the reasons for Jesus' crucifixion —and there is so much to it— it is clear that from a purely legal and political standpoint, these events this day cause his arrest. Acting like the king, processing into the royal city. Acting like the king, claiming authority over the Temple. These won't endear you to those who pretend they are in charge.

Jesus knows what he is doing, and where it will lead. Maybe that's why in van Hemessen's painting, Jesus' face makes you wonder if his thoughts are elsewhere.

IV

In the midst of it all, Jesus is weeping.

He is weeping for Jerusalem, the holy city. He knows the voices hell-bent on violence will prevail; they usually do. Zealotry will win the day, and everyone will lose. The city will be crushed, its people destroyed. Jesus knows, so he weeps.

What of God's way? The even-more revolutionary way of peace, of loving enemies and forgiving them, and so changing them? Jesus' way of righteousness and holiness shown through compassion? His way is no less zealous. It's more so. More courageous, more committed, more uncompromising. It will be rejected. He will be rejected. Abandoned as a disappointed. Tossed aside as a troublemaker. He weeps.

Not for himself. For us. For our world. Our world that continually rejects him and his way. Our world he continues to embrace, to love, to save.

V

These are hard days. Are you close to tears? Have tears fallen down your face? Stress. Exhaustion. Fear. Grief. Tears for our world, our community, our neighbours. Those suffering. Those dying. Those helping.

Treasure your tears. For with them, your heart is joined with God's.

Tom Wright says, "*Jesus' tears are at the core of the Christian gospel.*"⁴ It's the good news. The good news of God's tears.

Jesus' Palm Sunday parade continued, through the days following, to the Golgotha stone of his execution. So it was, in the peculiar politics of the cross, and the unyielding love of

⁴ N. T. Wright, Luke for Everyone (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001, 2004), 231.

God, the way of his victory. God's triumph, necessarily given with tears.

Let's finish, listening to Malcolm Guite reading his poem, Jesus Weeps for Jerusalem.

*Jesus comes near and he beholds the city
And looks on us with tears in his eyes,
And wells of mercy, streams of love and pity
Flow from the fountain whence all things arise.*

*He loved us into life and longs to gather
And meet with his beloved face to face
How often has he called, a careful mother,
And wept for our refusals of his grace,*

*Wept for a world that, weary with its weeping,
Benumbed and stumbling, turns the other way,
Fatigued compassion is already sleeping
Whilst her worst nightmares stalk the light of day.*

*But we might waken yet, and face those fears,
If we could see ourselves through Jesus' tears.⁵*

⁵ <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2017/04/08/holy-week-monday-jesus-weep-over-jerusalem-4/>