

Peace on Earth as It Is in Heaven

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Fort Hill Presbyterian Church
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Luke 19:28-40

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.

Proclamation of the Word

Perhaps you have been to an Easter Parade. The only Easter parade I was a part of was in Miss Alexander's first-grade class. Our Easter bonnets were made of paper plates, paper curling ribbons and bows. The boys made black top hats out of construction paper. We paraded down the aisles of McKelvey Elementary school to the delight of our parents at the PTA program that year singing Irving Berlin's "In your Easter Bonnet with all the frills upon it, you'll be the grandest lady in the Easter parade." It is the only Easter Parade I ever attended unless you count Palm Sunday re-enactments. We have all now been to at least one Palm Sunday parade as the drama of holy week unfolds.

But most of us have attended a Christmas parade. We know to expect: floats and demonstrations by the rifle teams, jump rope team, and dance studios. We will hear "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" and if we're lucky we'll hear a Christmas Carol or two."

We know what to expect from a Christmas parade.

In much the same way, the Passover pilgrims who had arrived in Jerusalem that year for the festival knew what to expect. Now, think Christmas parade with a lot more rowdy

in it. The tenor of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem had the same excitement that fans have for their team. Jesus is greeted by his posse. Luke reports that his disciples were filling the streets and shouting like excited fans Rockin' the John before a game. The final results are still yet to be seen, but they know where their allegiance lies.

Jesus has created quite a following. His own fans are lining the streets of Jerusalem for his big entrance while Jesus prepares for the big day on the outskirts of town in Bethphage and Bethany. He will make his entry when the time is right. But he is lacking one thing. He needs a colt, the foal of a donkey. For it says in the Old Testament book of the prophet Zechariah 9:9

"Lo, your king comes to you triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

He will be fulfilling the prophecy in his venture to the cross just as he did in his birth.

Jesus was born to make known the ways of God. He was God in the flesh- God made-real. And Christmas and Easter are the two bookends of our faith. There is no Christmas cradle without the cross. Consider the two important events and the similarities.

Born in another Beth-something town called Bethlehem, he now waits at Bethphage and Bethany- the staging area for the parade.

His mother rode into town on a donkey, and he will ride a donkey's colt to Jerusalem.

He was born a hungry, crying, diaper-wet baby.

And he will enter Jerusalem now to fulfill his purpose- the reason he was born- to make manifest the salvation and redemption.

And he will die a horrible death.

Only now, a multitude of his disciples will sing his praise, not a band of heavenly angels. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth Peace, Goodwill to all." And now the disciples will shout the refrain of Psalm 118,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Peace on earth is matched by peace in heaven.

Jesus came to make known the peace of God.

Luke's telling of the birth of Jesus is surrounded by words of peace, This theme begins at the end of Zechariah's song. Zechariah is the father of John the Baptist and he sings: " by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of **peace**. (1:79). The theme of peace continues with the angels song: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **peace** among those whom he favors!" (2:14). It shows up in old Simeon's song at the presentation in the Temple: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in **peace**, according to your word; (2:29)

Jesus came to bring God's salvation and to announce the good news that through relationship with him, we might follow and know God's peace.

...but how easily we forget the ways of God's peace.

Consider the irony of this...

Philip Gourevich has written about genocide in Rwanda in 1994. One day Gourevich was standing in front of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC reading a newspaper. On the front page were photographs of murdered Rwandan Tutsis, their swollen bodies floating down a river. And as he stood there, Gourevich noted the irony, "People were walking by me on the way to work wearing buttons saying 'Remember' and 'Never Again'" in reference to the Holocaust.ⁱ

Remember. . . Never Again. . . Peace on Earth . . . Good Will to All People.

Tom Long the Presbyterian preaching professor at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta reflects, "If these are to be more than easy expressions of cheer and fleeting good intentions, they must be seen not as sentiments but as commands, words that summon not just a mood but a steady and faithful obedience."

This is why Luke reminds us of a nearly forgotten Christmas message crosses the path of Jesus as he rode down from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem.

"Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" cried the disciples.

Tom Long continues, "Luke wants us to know that these words we so cheerily send to each other at Christmas come with a Good Friday price. The words sung at Jesus' birth are now marking his path to Calvary. The angels' cry of "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good will to all people!" was not merely a birth announcement but a set of marching orders to which Jesus was obedient throughout his life."ⁱⁱ

And follow those marching orders, he did. He was a king of peace, but not as one expected.

He mocked the ways of a violent world by not reacting in the same way.

He came to bring salvation and reconciliation by commanding we pray for our enemies, not by using the sword.

He had the strength to face the ways of death and violence holding fast to peace and standing on the side of life.

He showed the salvation of God by inviting himself to eat with a tax-collector named Zaccheus, and standing up to those in power.

He healed a hemorrhaging woman who had been cast aside, and noticed the widow who gave everything she had.

He called fishermen to follow him and serve in the highest positions in his cabinet.

He tried to reconcile brother to brother, Jew to Greek, and men to women.
These are the ways of peace Jesus tells us with his life.

So this Palm Sunday parade, ask yourself if you are willing to follow him, wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Prince of Peace?

Are you willing to cast your coat onto the ground and make way for one such as Jesus and to wave the banner of God's glory even if it is unpopular or dangerous?

The Pharisees make their final plea and ask Jesus to shut these people up. Silence them... but Jesus refuses saying the stones would shout if they did not. All of creation, even the stones, will praise God and make way for the king of peace.

At the end of the parade Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, not for himself, but for those he loves- God's children who cannot imagine his Kingdom of peace.

He casts words of judgment over Jerusalem and implicates all of us who cannot recognize God's visitation in Jesus.

He weeps even now.

He sees his beloved city Jerusalem where those with the power are building settlements and pushing those without power into tent cities.

He sees those who are devastated by joblessness, disaster, or greed.

He sees Pontius Pilate gathering his army in order to keep the peace and quiet any opposition.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and he knows that they have forgotten about peace on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus says to us, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42) The Irish rock band U2 laments the lack of peace on earth in their song "Peace on Earth"

*Heaven on Earth, we need it now
I'm sick of all of this hanging around
Sick of sorrow, sick of the pain
I'm sick of hearing again and again
That there's gonna be peace on Earth*

*Where I grew up there weren't many trees
Where there was we'd tear them down
And use them on our enemies
They say that what you mock
Will surely overtake you
And you become a monster
So the monster will not break you*

*And it's already gone too far
Who said that if you go in hard
You won't get hurt?*

*Jesus can you take the time
To throw a drowning man a line
Peace on Earth
Tell the ones who hear no sound
Whose sons are living in the ground
Peace on Earth
No whos or whys
No one cries like a mother cries
For peace on Earth
She never got to say goodbye
To see the color in his eyes
Now he's in the dirt
Peace on Earth*

*They're reading names out over the radio
All the folks the rest of us won't get to know
Sean and Julia, Gareth and Ann and Breda
Their lives are bigger than any big idea*

*Jesus can you take the time
To throw a drowning man a line
Peace on Earth
To tell the ones who hear no sound
Whose sons are living in the ground
Peace on Earth
Jesus sing a song you wrote
The words are sticking in my throat
Peace on Earth
Hear it every Christmas time
But hope and history won't rhyme
So what's it worth
This peace on Earth*


(Album: All That You Can't Leave Behind By U2)

Those of us who cannot see the ways of peace, must confess our sin of taking part in the suffering of Jesus. We must not stand at a distance, for we are a part of the band of disciples. We must acknowledge our part in the crowd that turns a few days later to shout, "Crucify him!"

But, thanks be to God, our Lord will not accept death as the final answer, for God always stands on the side of life. When he is raised up on the side of life, may we be prepared to shout again,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

May our shouts of praise be matched by our commitment to live in peace saying,
REMEMBER,
NEVER AGAIN!



ⁱ Thomas G. Long, *Season's Greetings (Luke 19:28-40)*; *The Christian Century*, March 21-28, 2001 p. 13.

ⁱⁱ IBID