

## **Year C-Palm Sunday-2019-The Stones Shout Out**

**April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

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**Luke 19:28-40**

### **The Stones Shout Out!**

Rob's bulletin graphic captures the spirit of what I hope to convey. In the forefront is a palm branch, symbol of love, praise and joy as Jesus enters Jerusalem. Behind it stands the crucifix, another symbol of love, praise and joy but in a darker key and with power that transcends even the most powerful of symbols.

Jesus had just told the hated chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, that he too is a child of Abraham. Then he told a parable that ends with "But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence." I still can't make sense of that parable located immediately before today's story that begins, "After he had said this he "went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." Is this Luke's way of stationing the crucifix behind the palm branch? As I think about it now, Jesus was slaughtered in the presence of his enemies. When Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem he knows this is his destiny.

Jesus is going toward the Mount of Olives, the traditional place where the Messiah was to return. Two villages were situated on the lower slopes of this mountain, Bethphage and Bethany and Jesus is about to start his ascent from there. Before he begins, he sends two of his disciples ahead to the next village with instructions to bring him a colt they will find tied there that has never been ridden. They are to untie the colt and bring him to Jesus. If anyone asks them why they are doing this they are to say, "The Lord needs it." Everything about Jesus' instruction suggests careful planning. This did not happen by accident. Intentionality is written all over it. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing.

"So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.'" Two disciples go to the outskirts of the next village and untie someone else's colt. It's a good thing Jesus sent two. Otherwise the owner might have refused. But no, then I notice that there were also more than one owner and they apparently grant permission without a fuss. Luke is going out of his way to say this colt was not obtained through any form of violence. He wasn't stolen, no one was "guilted" into releasing him, superior power was not used; no, the colts' use was entirely voluntary and un-coerced. Even the colt did not object. Remember, traditional kings conscripted whatever they wanted and the owners stolen from were afraid to object. Luke is setting the stage for the triumphal entry into Jerusalem of a non-violent Jesus.

To avoid confusion over colt vs ass, know that Matthew does say, “You will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.” Luke and Mark say, “You will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat.” In all the gospels, the commonality is that the animal Jesus rides contrasts with a war horse—that’s the point.

As far back as I can remember I have wondered why Jesus rode a colt who had never been broken. I knew about these things because my dad tried to “break” a horse when I was very young and wound up with a broken leg. The horse broke him and that was the last time we had a pony on our farm until my youngest sister reached adolescence well after I had left home. My dad’s approach to breaking a horse was to enter into what he thought of as a battle of the wills with the horse. I suspect the horse didn’t understand this and simply was afraid of my dad so bucked him off. I think my father, quite young at the time, took it a little more personally than that.

Well, this brings us back to why Luke wants us to know Jesus rode a colt that had never been ridden. A clue came for me when I watched a video of a master horse trainer “breaking” a horse in half an hour. His approach was incredibly gentle, always aware that the horse was afraid because its’ predators attack was usually from above and behind horse’s head, and that the trainer’s goal was to win the horse’s trust. The horse didn’t mind doing what his human master wanted if it weren’t afraid. This explains for me why Jesus could ride an unbroken horse. Jesus has no fear in him and inspires no fear from those who are vulnerable and defenseless.

We don’t know how Jesus knew there would be a colt tied up in the village where the climb to Jerusalem begins. It would be easy to say Jesus had a superman style capacity to see into the future and around corners and maybe he did. But magic aside, it does show the depth of Jesus’ desire to communicate his profound peace to all creatures including the poor, broken, shut-out, and powerless who gathered in the slums surrounding the city core as he prepared to enter the tense city.

As I thought about the tense city and how to convey that feeling I remembered a story my dad used to tell about his days in the war as part of the crew of a C-46 transport plane. They were flying trucks into a base somewhere in the Philippines when while in flight they began smelling gas fumes. Someone had forgotten to empty the gas tank on one of the trucks. In the light air at an altitude the gas fumes evaporated from the gas tank filling the aircraft with fumes. The slightest spark anywhere in the plane would turn it into an exploding bomb. By this time they had no choice but to fly their plane to their destination knowing that at any moment they could be incinerated. This was how Jerusalem was as Jesus approached the ancient city. The air was filled with volatile social fumes as polarized groups rubbed shoulders with each other. The slightest spark could set off murderous violence.

Back to earth, when the crowd threw their cloaks on that colts back and Jesus' disciples set Jesus on them, what kind of cloth covered the colts back? I think the colt was covered with old rags like you see around the homeless camps on the entries to Portland or the dirty old coats the poor wear in the impoverished parts of our globe. I doubt the colt was draped in royal blues, silk or fine linen. These were poor people who shouted "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

This king didn't make them afraid. With him they sensed even God was for them and didn't reject them for being poor and having lost their land to the wealthy that now lived in Jerusalem. "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" they shouted.

Luke says they were shouting in praise of the deeds of power they had seen Jesus do. When he cured their lame, throw out evil spirits, healed those with fevers, brought the dead to life, it gave them hope and brought them into a unity that transcended their petty conflicts. Here was a king who wouldn't hurt them. The colt, still unafraid, stepped through the layers of crude fabric in accordance with his master's desire. A new king, a new sort of king, was entering history and no one was afraid. Even the shouting, singing, rejoicing, happy voices of a multitude of people didn't spook the colt. The multitude sang, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

But not all were happy with these hopeful and joyous voices. People feeling hope are hard to control. Better they be depressed. "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'" This is the message on this Palm Sunday, 2019. Thanks be to God. Amen.