

Luke 19:28-40

Itinerarium + Responsive Prayer 2 + November 8, 2015
Doxology Encore + Chiara Center, Springfield, Illinois
Pastor Tim Pauls

In the name of Jesus. Amen

Almost time to go home.

We've been dawdling around the readings for the end of the church year the past couple of days, but for this one we tip into the Gospel lesson for Advent 1, soon to come. It seems a fitting text, as Jesus has an itinerarium of His own going: from Jericho to Bethphage and Bethany by the mount called Olivet, then on to Jerusalem. Then, in short order, to Calvary, grave, hell and back again, a locked room, a few more stops and then the right hand of God.

It's Palm Sunday. The temple is about to be cleansed, betrayal is in the air, the cross is near, the Sacrifice for sin is about to be made, the tension is thick. And as all of this is about to break, the Lord needs a donkey.

Gets me every time. Half of that Gospel lesson is about how the Lord of heaven and earth needs a donkey.

This isn't a pretext to preach about the need for church workers to plan better so you don't end up a donkey short like Jesus. No, the reason that the Lord needs a donkey is because He says He does.

He's said so for a long time, since the time of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). So that Jerusalem might be sure that He's indeed the Messiah, says the prophet, look for the King on a donkey, giving righteousness and salvation.

In other words, Jesus needs a donkey for you. He ties Himself to that colt in the Old and New Testaments as one more assurance, one more prophecy fulfilled, that your King has come.

The crowd gets it. They praise God, pouring forth all the mighty works that they've seen. "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" they shout, straight out of that magnificent messianic Psalm 118. "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" they cry, a near-echo of the angels' song when Jesus is born. All grown up now, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with peace and glory, life and salvation. Not a bad kick-off for a new church year.

The Pharisees are not amused. Their legislated lives of earning righteousness have no place for a king who just goes around handing out life willy-nilly to any old repentant sinner. "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples," they demand. Rather than rejoice to hear shouts that God is faithful, that He's kept His Word and the Christ has come, they want the praise to be silenced.

To these, Jesus says, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones will cry out." Huh. The Lord needs these people to sing His praises: not, of course, because He's ego-driven or suffers from low self-esteem, or because He's losing His voice. He needs them like He needs the donkey, because this is how He has declared His salvation will be spread. He puts His Word into His people: He opens their lips, and their mouths declare His praise. Others hear and believe, and so the kingdom of God grows. No praise, no Word. No Word, no Jesus; and then all that's left is for stones to cry out. So it will be in Jerusalem, as Jesus mentions just after our text. He weeps

for the city, foretells its utter destruction and says, "And [your enemies] will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43-44). The dismantled stones of the temple will cry out of a terrible desolation, that the Lord visited with life and sinners wanted Him gone so terribly that they put Him on a cross to make it so.

You're stuck between Pharisees and hordes of a different ilk. On the one hand, there are those who submit to a greater teaching than themselves and insist that the way to God is by way of keeping all the rules; some of these can be quite insistent when they ring your doorbell; and others violent to the point of beheading those Christians who fail to comply. On the other hand, you're daily immersed in a society of individuals who aren't going to submit to anything, who are going to live their lives according to their personal choices and expect that God is pleased with whatever sin they determine He should delight in. It may seem strange to put, for instance, the ISIS fighter and the same-sex marriage lobbyist in the same camp, for they surely wouldn't get along with each other. But the teachings of both have something big in common. Both want the Church to be silent. Both want the people of God to shut up about the Gospel. Both want to rebuke Jesus' disciples until they are quiet.

The intimidation is strong these days, the Church is afflicted with an undercurrent of fear, and the goal of fear is silence. The devil prefers silent Christians: it prevents the praises of God from getting into the ears of others; and it discourages faith because faith is just jumping to declare the praises of God. Now if the devil is going to silence the Church, a good place to start is on the leadership. If you are a lay leader here, you can rest assured that the devil will do his best to make your tasks as burdensome as possible so that it feels like a drudgery not worth doing; unless of course he goes back door and inflates you with pride until you feel like the congregation can't survive without you. (At that point, he doesn't mind if you talk, because you won't be talking about Jesus anymore!) And if you're a pastor, the temptation of pride is there for you too; or else the evil one will work you over until you feel like a useless mouth, until you're weary and convinced that the Word you speak isn't accomplishing anything, so you might as well just be quiet.

The devil is called the father of lies for a reason.

The truth is that Jesus needs you—at least, in the sense that He needs donkeys and the crowd on Palm Sunday. He needs preachers and leaders who hold up prophets' hands because He's said so, because He's entrusted the proclamation of the Gospel to people. Real people. People with names, written in the Book of Life at the font and called into various offices as His instruments. If you're called into the Office of the Holy Ministry, it is not because the Lord was scraping the bottom of the barrel that day. You are there because He calls you to be His mouth and His hands in that place for His people. If you're a lay leader...well, if the Lord didn't want you where you are, you wouldn't have won the election, even though you were running unopposed. You're not where you are because the Lord is out to get you, but for such a time as this.

Don't get the wrong idea. All of this assumes that you're abiding in the Word that He has spoken. You're not indispensable: wander away from the faith, and the Lord can find someone else to declare His praise. Or start to take over offices that don't belong to you, and you're acting against the Word and starting to silence it. So if you call a donkey or a rock to be a pastor, it is not that he's your pastor because God wills it in His Word for His Church, but because you're joining the hordes outside the Church who want God to approve of whatever you want Him to. Beware.

And rather than entertain such sinful shenanigans, rejoice. The Lord prefers you to donkeys and rocks. After all, He didn't become a donkey to die for donkeys or a rock to die for

rocks. He became man to die for you. And for His people in the congregation back home. And for all who will hear and believe. For all, actually.

So go home. Depart in peace and joy. The Lord watches over your going out and your coming in both now and forevermore. The One who's been to hell and back goes with you. Sing like the crowds on Palm Sunday! Declare Christ Jesus who brings glory and peace, and who still comes in the name of the Lord to save in His means of grace. Proclaim Christ crucified and risen, knowing that it kicks death and devil in the teeth every time. O, rejoice: for your sake, the Lord will not keep silent because He has redeemed you by His own blood. Though devil and world will call you all sorts of things, the Lord calls you His holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, sought out and not forsaken.

Go forth with praise in the name of the Lord, for the One who comes in the name of the Lord has come to you; and in His means of grace, He is with you always, even to the end of the age.

In the name of Jesus. Amen