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Luke 19:28-46

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LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING

Last Sunday was Tartan Day, a day for the celebration of Scottish heritage. But though Scottishness is ancient, Tartan Day is a very recent event. It is not even Scottish! Tartan Day is unknown in Scotland, which already has two perfectly good days for the celebration of Scottishness: St Andrew's Day on November 30, and Burn's Night on January 25. Tartan Day is a Canadian and American invention, a day for wannabe Scots. It has been designated by both Houses of Congress, and in 2008 by Presidential Proclamation. Though Tartan Day is not Scottish and has little history, the date chosen commemorates an ancient Scottish event: the Declaration of Arbroath, signed on April 6, 1320. This was an appeal by the Scottish nobles to the pope, saying that they did not want the king of England to reign over them; they wanted their own Scottish king. This year is the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn (June 24, 1314) when the Scots beat the English and sent them homeward to think again. This is the battle depicted in the movie *Braveheart*. The relationship between Scotland and England is once again unsettled. On September 18, Scotland will hold a referendum on the question, "Should Scotland be independent?"

A similar situation prevailed in first-century Judea. The Jews were chafing under Roman occupation. They longed to have their own king again, a Jewish king. They had recently had a king, Herod the Great, King of the Jews. But he wasn't a proper king: he wasn't even really a Jew, and certainly was not of the royal line of David. They wanted the real thing, a king like David of old. Each year their aspirations for liberation peaked at Passover, when they remembered how God had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Each year they hoped that God would again deliver them from oppression, sending them the Messiah who would restore the kingdom to Israel.

In the Jewish calendar, Passover begins tomorrow evening. In the Christian calendar, today is Palm Sunday, the day when we remember Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. All four gospels record this event. Luke's account was read earlier (19:28-46). Of the four evangelists, Luke is particularly interested in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The journey occupies ten chapters, beginning in chapter 9:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51 ESV)

Luke gives us periodic reminders that Jesus is on his way (17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). After Jesus had visited Jericho, his final stop,

he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return... But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" (Luke 19:11-12, 14)

This is usually called the Parable of the Ten Minas, but for our purposes today I will call it the Parable of the Returning King. The king returns, and the parable ends with these words from him:

"But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me." (19:27)

There was a historical event behind this parable: when Herod the Great died in 4 BC, his son Herod Archelaus went to Rome hoping to be granted the title King of the Jews. But the Jews themselves sent a delegation to Rome saying that they did not want him to rule over them. But Jesus and Luke don't have the Herodian dynasty in mind in telling this parable. It seems to me that Luke has deliberately placed this parable here so that we have it in mind as Jesus makes his final approach to Jerusalem, which begins in the next verse.

Entrance into Jerusalem

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. (19:28)

The ascent to Jerusalem is a long climb of nearly 3500 feet from Jericho at 850 feet below sea level to Jerusalem at 2500 feet above. The road climbs through the barren Judean wilderness until it reaches the Mount of Olives. Most tourists make this ascent by tour bus. At the end of the climb Luke slows down the narrative pace to describe Jesus' final approach to Jerusalem. Three times he writes that Jesus was drawing near, until finally Jesus entered.

Approach 1

When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. (19:29-36)

Jesus drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, twin villages on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Bethany is just two miles from Jerusalem. There Jesus sent two disciples to requisition a colt; such requisitioning of private property for service was a prerogative of the king or other important dignitary. His disciples seated Jesus on the colt, just as David had instructed Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet to seat Solomon on his own mule and lead him to the Gihon Spring, there to anoint him as king (1 Kgs 1:32-34). The disciples spread their cloaks on the road before Jesus, just as people had

spread their garments before Jehu, the newly anointed king of Israel (2 Kgs 9:13).

Approach 2

As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (19:37-40)

Jesus rode on, again drawing near, now descending the Mount of Olives. The great company of disciples rejoiced and praised God:

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

The first line of this acclaim is from Psalm 118, read as our call to worship:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. (Ps 118:26)

Matthew, Mark and John all quote this verbatim, but Luke adds a phrase, “Blessed is the one who comes, *the King*, in the name of the Lord.” He wants us to be in no doubt that this one who comes in the name of the Lord does so as the King. The other evangelists add in “Hosanna,” also a quote from Psalm 118, a transliteration of the cry “Save us, we pray (*hosbi’ah-na*)” (118:25); Matthew and Mark both have “Hosanna in the highest,” which our children have led us in singing this morning. But again Luke does something different: not “Hosanna in the highest,” but “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” This is an echo of the angel’s chorus, announcing Jesus’ birth to the shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”
(2:14)

Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax: thus the angels praised God. The shepherds praised God “for all they had seen and heard” (2:20). Now the disciples were praising God “for all the mighty works that they had seen” (19:37). The advent of Jesus to Jerusalem was echoing his advent to Bethlehem. But will there be peace on earth?

Approach 3

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” (19:41-44)

Jesus drew closer still: “when he drew near and saw the city.” As he came around the southern shoulder of the Mount of Olives, on the road from Jericho through Bethany, Jerusalem came into view. Today all tour groups are taken to the Mount of Olives for the view over Jerusalem. This is one of the world’s great sights. The most prominent feature is the temple mount, rising the other side of the Kidron Brook. The temple platform visible today is the one built by Herod the Great; the same that Jesus would have seen. For the past 1300 years it has been occupied by the Dome of the Rock, a beautiful

building. In Jesus’ day it was occupied by a building at least as grand: the Temple. This view should have filled Jesus with pride and joy. But he didn’t gasp in awe; instead, he wept. Today, on the slope of the Mount of Olives, above the Garden of Gethsemane, stands the church *Dominus Flevit*, “The Lord wept.” This is a beautiful Franciscan church designed in the 1950s by Barluzzi, an architect who designed many lovely churches around the Holy Land. He shaped this church like a tear to recall these tears of Jesus over the city.

Jesus lamented the city’s blindness and ignorance: “If you had known...but you did not know!” “Would that you had known the things that make for peace... [but] you did not know the time of your visitation.” Will there be peace on earth? Not in Jerusalem, for the city is blind to peace. Would that you knew the things that make for peace! This is what I would like to say to the two sides of the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process currently shepherded by John Kerry. The current round is due to run through April 29 but has broken down amid blame from both sides. The two sides know the things that will make for peace, but are unwilling to take the necessary steps.

In Jerusalem’s case the things that would make for peace were now hidden from it. It was too late. The structure of Jesus’ lament makes it clear that the things that make for peace are the time of its visitation. “Visitation” is a loaded word. In the Old Testament God promised or threatened that he would visit Israel. Whether that visitation was for good or ill depended on whether it was for salvation or for judgment. The Lord had promised that he would come to his people, and now he had arrived in the person of Jesus. Jesus had made his final approach to Jerusalem. He had drawn nearer and nearer and nearer, and was now about to enter. But Malachi warned,

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...
But who can endure the day of his coming?” (Mal 3:1-2)

The people to whom Jesus was coming were ignorant. They had eyes that did not see, ears that did not hear, and hearts that did not understand.

Entrance

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.” (19:45-46)

At last the journey was over: Jesus entered the temple. He had reached his destination: not simply Jerusalem, but specifically the temple. He did not like what he found: the house of prayer had been turned into a den of robbers.

The temple was a magnificent building, the pride and joy of Jerusalem. Solomon’s temple had been beautiful. Herod’s temple was more beautiful still. But yet more glorious was the theology of the temple, what it represented. It was God’s footprint on earth, the focal point of his kingdom. It was a house of prayer. It was the conduit to God’s eye, ear and heart. Solomon understood this when he dedicated the temple:

“Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this

place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.” (2 Chr 6:19-21)

The Lord heeded Solomon’s prayer:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.” (2 Chr 7:12-16)

This temple would be for more than just Israel. Through Isaiah the Lord proclaimed that foreigners also would be welcome,

“for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isa 56:7)

But the temple that Jesus entered was not serving such glorious purposes. It wasn’t the conduit to the eye, ear and heart of the Lord; not for the Jews, still less for the foreigners. Instead, Jesus found that the religious leaders had corrupted the house of the Lord into a den of rebels. This is what the Lord had said through Jeremiah concerning the first temple:

“Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?” (Jer 7:11)

The word “robber” here doesn’t mean simply a burglar or a thief. It designates a brigand, a rebel, a revolutionary, an insurrectionist. The temple in Jeremiah’s day had become a nest of rebels, rebels against God. Yet the religious leadership in the temple was confident that all would be well:

“saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” (Jer 6:14; 8:11)

Their behavior was suicidal, leading to the destruction of the first temple. The behavior of the religious leadership in the days of Jesus was similarly suicidal. It, too, would bring about the destruction of the temple. “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!” The city and the temple will be destroyed, “because you did not know the time of your visitation.” Israel’s history was being played out all over again. Israel had not learnt the lessons of history, and those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

A Royal Visit

Somewhere along the way, this entrance into Jerusalem came to be called the Triumphal Entry. This is how the passage is headed in English versions. But there’s nothing triumphal about it, especially not in Luke’s account. A triumph was a celebratory procession awarded by the Roman Senate to a victorious general, who would parade through Rome on a chariot pulled by four white horses, to the acclaim of the crowd. He would parade to the temple of Jupiter, there to offer sacrifices. The movie *Gladiator* depicts Commodus in triumphal procession. For Jesus there will be a triumphal procession, but this is not it. Paul twice uses the imagery of the Roman triumph (2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15), but not to refer to this event. In a Roman triumph the victorious general was acclaimed by both leaders and people. Luke shows that it was only the great throng of disciples who acclaimed Jesus. The leadership was silent. The Pharisees tried

to silence these disciples. The temple leadership was entirely absent. Yet in Psalm 118 the cry, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” issues from the temple: “We bless you from the house of the LORD.” But the temple was silent; worse, it had become a den of rebels who rejected God’s rule.

Jesus was indeed making a procession into Jerusalem. But it was not a triumphal procession by a victorious general. It was a royal visit by the king. The Roman world had a term for such a visit: the Greek word *parousia*. When a ruler or major dignitary visited a city, the people of that city, especially its leading citizens, would come out of the city some way to meet him and escort him into the city. The placing of the parable of the returning king immediately before Jesus’ approach to Jerusalem invites us, I think, to view this approach as a royal visit. Could it be that Luke’s three-fold use of “draw near” emphasizes that no one came out to meet Jesus? At each stage of drawing near he was close enough for a delegation to come out and escort him in.

God had come to visit his people, and he had come in the person of Jesus who was making a royal visit. But the citizens hated him and said, “We do not want this man to reign over us.” The religious leadership rejected God’s visitation. Within just a few days Jesus would be dead, crucified beneath a sign reading, “This is the King of the Jews” (23:38).

The disciples who had accompanied Jesus on his royal visit to Jerusalem were crushed. On the road to Emmaus two of them said, “we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (24:21). Even after their mysterious traveling companion said, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (24:26), they did not understand. Even after the risen Jesus had shown himself many times to the disciples, they still did not understand. Immediately prior to his ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). There was still the same longing and expectation as when Jesus and his retinue left Jericho.

It was only after the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that the disciples came to understand that the death of Jesus was not defeat but victory, that the people’s rejection of him was within God’s purposes. Paul later wrote,

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col 2:15)

Jesus’ death on the cross was not defeat but triumph. The resurrection subsequently declared that Jesus’ death on the cross was triumph. Jesus ascended into heaven, where God seated him at his right hand, enthroning him as king. God has restored his kingdom and he has installed his King. Not the kingdom of Israel and not a throne in Jerusalem, so we shouldn’t look there for kingdom, throne or temple. Ever since the enthronement of the risen and ascended Christ, God has been transferring people into this kingdom:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13-14)

Formerly we had said, “We do not want you to reign over us,” but having been transferred into Christ’s kingdom we find his rule to be a benevolent rule, and we take our place in his procession:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession. (2 Cor 2:14)

There is still one more royal visit to come. The word *parousia* is used a couple of dozen times in the New Testament, most often to refer to the Lord's coming, that is, his Second Coming, his return. For example, Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4:15-17)

These verses have nothing to do with the Rapture as popularly imagined. We await the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord. He will come from heaven to earth on a royal visit. Unlike the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem 2000 years ago, this time he will be met and escorted in. This escort will include all his people, those who have already died and those who are still alive. Both the newly-resurrected dead and the living will go to meet the Lord in the air, on his pathway from heaven to earth. They meet him not so that they can go back with him to where he came from, but so that they can escort him to where they have come from, the destination of his royal visit, namely the earth. The word translated "meet" is a technical term for those who go out of the city to meet the arriving dignitary and escort him in. The same word is used for those who escorted Paul into Rome:

And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. (Acts 28:15)

At the end of time the earth will receive her king. Meanwhile, this king reigns from the Father's right hand. God has brought us into his kingdom. As he leads us in Christ's triumphal procession, he

through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (2 Cor 2:14-15)

We are ambassadors of this king, his fragrant presence in the world. Jesus himself taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is through us, his subjects on earth, that he is fulfilling this prayer, from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. May we be the aroma of Christ our King in the world, a fragrance that brings life.

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