

Palm Sunday  
April 14, 2019  
Mr. Brandon McGinnis

Luke 19:28-40

### **Waging Peace in the City of Peace**

There *was* a battle raging in the wilderness, but now it has come to the city. And not just any city, but Jerusalem: *yeru-shalayim*, the City of Peace.

If you can remember back to the first Sunday in Lent, all the way back to the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, then you might recall how after being bested by Jesus, the Gospel of Luke tells us that the devil departed from him until an opportune time. Today we have arrived at that opportune time.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem marks the beginning of the final showdown between the heavenly Kingdom of God and the false, earthly kingdom of Satan. The battle that raged in the wilderness now escalates into a total war for the allegiance of humankind. And like countless wars throughout history, this war begins with two armies marching toward one another.

Pontius Pilate approaches the city of Jerusalem from the west, coming down from Caesarea Maritima, the premiere Roman colony in the region. Pilate, mounted on a warhorse, leads an entire legion of Roman soldiers, complete with infantry and chariots, into the city.

This military parade is a special delivery of Roman "peace and security" meant to deter any civil unrest during the Jewish Passover. Pilate's terrifying display of Rome's military prowess sends a clear message to his Jewish subjects: "Don't try anything stupid."

Jesus of Nazareth approaches the city of Jerusalem from the east, coming down from Mount of Olives, the very spot where Jewish tradition held that the Messiah—the liberator of Israel—would appear. Jesus, mounted on the colt of a donkey, leads a multitude—an army—of disciples, many of whom spread their cloaks on the road before him; something that is only ever done for a king.

Jesus' dramatic procession fulfills the words of Zechariah: "Lo, your king comes to you... humble and riding on a donkey... He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem..." This triumphant parade sends a clear message back to Rome: "Israel's true king is here."

As these two armies march toward one another, the battle lines between the heavenly Kingdom of God and the false, earthly kingdom of Satan are drawn as clear as they have ever been. But those battle lines do not fall where we might expect.

They do not fall neatly between the Pilate's soldiers and Jesus' disciples. It is not Pilate's parade vs. Jesus' parade. It is Jesus alone vs. them both. For the two parades are actually one-in-the-same. Pilate and his soldiers are in Jerusalem to enforce the reign of their king through violence. And so is the multitude of the disciples.

The multitude expects Israel's king to be a Jewish version of Caesar: founding his kingdom upon violence and ruthless power; but that is exactly that kind of kingdom that Jesus rejected when he refused to worship Satan in the wilderness. Both Pilate and the multitude of disciples have come to wage war; it is Jesus alone who has come to wage peace.

At the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:14, the angels descend from heaven and sing, "Peace on earth!" But, as Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the multitude looks up from earth and sings, "Peace in heaven!"

Heaven sings peace to earth, but earth returns to sender. “There may be peace in heaven,” the disciples seem to say, “but we need war down here in the real world.” The multitude is oblivious to the fact that Jesus has *not* come to bring peace by some violent means, but is himself peace on earth.

And Jesus knows they don’t get it. In the verses immediately following our reading this morning, Jesus looks out over the city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and weeps. “Jerusalem!” he cries out. “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

Jerusalem—The City of Peace—does not know the things that make for peace. Only Jesus seems to know. Surrounded by the multitude on his way into a city, Jesus is just as alone as he was in his isolation in the wilderness.

Many a Palm Sunday sermon has pondered how exactly it is that the multitude of Jesus’ disciples can go from singing, “Hosanna,” today, to shouting, “Crucify him,” by Friday. But, I think the fact of the matter is, nothing about the situation changes; the disciples simply figure out—finally—who Jesus really is.

What I mean is that the *only* reason the multitude of disciples throws their cloaks on the road before Jesus and sing hosanna is because they have fundamentally misunderstood who he is. I suspect that if they had known what kind of King Jesus really was, then they would not have hailed him in the first place.

The moment of discovery that will translate songs of hosanna into shouts for crucifixion is Jesus’ capture in garden of Gethsemane. Judas, tempted by glamor of Satan’s kingdom, will think he can force the hand of his imagined warrior king by leading his enemies to him. Surely this will serve as a catalyst for a revolution! But Jesus will refuse to retaliate.

And when it becomes clear that Jesus will not defend himself, Peter will also succumb to temptation, thinking he can save his hopeful military savior by defending him with the sword. But Jesus will say quite clearly that a person cannot kill their way to peace.

When Jesus refuses to kill his enemies, he will lose the allegiance of all his disciples. They will flee away and even deny him. Eventually, the whole multitude will turn on Jesus when they realize their hopes for a warrior king are lost. In their bitter disappointment, the multitude will become a mob. And that mob will exchange the peaceable Jesus for the local war hero Barabbas. They will trade one Son of the Father—one Bar Abba—for another. They will trade the true Messiah for one that better fits their violent expectations.

But what about us gathered here today? Which Messiah will we choose? Will we pledge our allegiance to Jesus and to the heavenly Kingdom of God? Or will we pledge our allegiance to one like Barabbas and the false, earthly kingdom of Satan that he serves?

At this opportune time, do we know the things that make for peace or are they hidden from our eyes? On this Palm Sunday will we allow our Messiah to ride into that city alone? Or will we walk with him on the way of the cross—on the way of peace?