Lenten Series: Profiles in Courage

The Courage to Pursue Peace

Lent 6C-22

Luke 19

4/10/22

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Luke 19: 28-42**

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany,

at the place called the Mount of Olives,

he sent two of the disciples, saying,

“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.

If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’

just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

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.”

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Then they brought it to Jesus;

and after throwing their cloaks on the colt,

they set Jesus on it.

As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

As 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, saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

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.”

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying,

“If you, even you,

had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!

But now they are hidden from your eyes.

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“Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

After three years of traveling throughout Judea, Jesus finally made his way to the Holy City of Jerusalem—the heart of Hebrew life.

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City-goers could hardly believe it. They’d heard the stories about this miracle-maker—the lives he’d saved and the new ways he taught. Word had begun to spread that this could be the one the prophets spoke of—the Messiah God would send to right the wrongs and lower the hills and raise the valleys and establish peace, once and for all.

So as Jesus approached… they lined the streets and cried out. “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest heaven! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” as they also ripped leafy branches off trees and used their cloaks to cover the road… all so that Jesus wouldn’t get too dirty riding that donkey towards the city gates.

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It was, quite simply, a greeting fit for a king. For that’s what they hoped Jesus was. A king… a Lord… a Messiah God had sent to save Israel from the tyranny of Roman military might.

So “Hosanna” they cried, which means, “Save us!”

Hosanna! Save us from Roman taxation over land that was once our own.

Hosanna! Save us from subjugation to Roman laws that aren’t the Torah.

Hosanna! Save us… from our oppression.

Hosanna, they cried.

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Except, in Luke, the crowds don’t cry “Hosanna!” do they? The word Hosanna is so familiar… so connected to Palm Sunday… we assume each Gospel proclaims it amid the narrative of this day.

But not Luke. According to his Gospel, the crowds didn’t cry, “Hosanna,” but something much more specific. “Peace.” “Peace. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

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So the crowd cried out to the Prince of Peace… asking Jesus to help them find… establish… live life in peace.

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Almost like the litany we share every single week in our worship services… as we seek to share the peace of Christ with each other.

And yet… even when we seek to share the peace of Christ, it’s almost impossible to capture all that really entails.

For peace—or shalom, as it’s named in Hebrew—sits at the heart of God’s kingdom. It’s what God yearns to imbue into every space… and every person. Which is why the call to peace, or shalom, sat at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry. It’s why he sought to proclaim peace everywhere he went. Peace to those were near and those who were far off. Peace to neighbors and peace to enemies. Peace to the affluent and peace to poor. And, as Jesus was coming to Jerusalem specifically to reveal, his peace was especially oriented towards those who’d been pushed aside or pushed down.

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Jesus was so good at proclaiming peace, wasn’t he? He was so good at revealing it… sharing it… making space for it… that some of the religious leaders in the city tried to stop Jesus from bringing his peace into Jerusalem. “Teacher,” they said, “order your disciples to stop.”

They were scared—and rightfully so—at the upheaval Jesus’ peace could cause for those in power. Because when peace is established amid an unbalanced system… it entails a recalibration of power. When peace is established for all… suddenly the last become first and the least become the greatest.

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But Jesus knew that God’s kingdom required nothing less than this very peace. After all, it’s the peace he came to inaugurate amid the reign of God’s kingdom. So he responded to the religious leaders, “Even if every one of these people falls silent… the stones would begin crying out for peace. Because God’s will is peace. God’s reign is peace. God’s kingdom is peace.”

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But just what exactly does the peace Jesus speaks of mean?

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On its surface, English speakers often associate peace with the absence of violence… or the absence of conflict. But that’s not the Biblical understanding of the word.

While peace certainly entails a lack of violence… it also requires something Scripture calls justice.

An example of this can sadly be seen in Ukraine right now. Ukraine could theoretically surrender… become a Russian state… and live under Russian oppression. It would end the war… and end the horror of all the physical violence.

But we understand—even if Ukraine was to surrender—there still would be no peace… because there would be no justice in this.

And justice requires much more than an absence of violence.

Justice requires fairness… and equality. But even more than fairness and equality, true justice requires *equitability..*. where all have what they need… where all have a voice… where all have dignity and respect… and where all take the common good to heart… so that one person suffering is one person too many.

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So if the Christian understanding of peace requires justice… then peace requires both concern for the other… and a commitment to pursue it.

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Yes. And that right there… peace’s requirement to not only be concerned with the other… but committed to pursuing the other’s well-being is where so much gets lots.

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It certainly did amid Holy Week… and Luke portrays this in an incredible scene at the end of our lesson.

As Jesus finally made his way through the crowd and approached the city gates… he paused to take it all in. He saw the crowds. He heard their cries for peace—or at least a specific kind of peace. He understood they wanted him to confront the political system of the day and free the Hebrews from their Roman oppression.

But as Jesus looked at them all… he couldn’t hold back his tears… weeping as he said to himself, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”

“If you only understood the things that make space for peace…

“If you only understood the things that sustain peace…

“But you don’t.”

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Throughout the next four days, Jesus did everything he could do to share peace with all he could.

And make no mistake, he proclaimed peace to the political system. He confronted the empire that sought to oppress entire populations of people. He demonstrated with his very body that peace can never be obtained through force or oppression. Just as he modeled with his dying breath the power of peace found in love and grace.

But Jesus didn’t just confront the political system of his day with God’s demand for peace.

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He also confronted the economic system. He entered the holy Hebrew Temple and proclaimed peace… driving out the money changers who were trying to make a profit off of other people’s religious sacrifices. Then he pointed to a widow who gave two mere pennies… and proclaimed peace by announcing how her extravagant generosity put every wealthy person’s generosity to shame.

And he confronted the religious system and its leaders known as Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes. He proclaimed peace to them, accusing them of caring more about their own power and privilege than God’s people… calling them to model love and care in place of pride and greed.

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And that’s not all. As Jesus and his disciples continued their peace-making tour through Jerusalem, Jesus was sure to confront the cultural systems of the day, with the way he embraced tax collectors and prostitutes—known sinners. And how he equipped even women to be among his disciples.

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You see, Jesus came to Jerusalem to bring peace to not just to some… but to all. And he knew he couldn’t do that if he *only* confronted the political system. For the religious and economic and cultural systems were just as in need of peace and justice. So that’s what he did. He proclaimed the peace of God that demands justice… He proclaimed the peaceable Kingdom of God in which one person suffering is one person too many!

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But by Friday… it had all become too much. While the people of Jerusalem wanted Jesus to confront the political system, they were perfectly fine with a culture that had both insiders and outsiders—because they were the ones on the inside.

Just as the people of Jerusalem were comfortable with a religious system geared towards the temple and strict application of Torah law—because they, after all, lived in the city that housed the great Hebrew Temple and most of the priests.

Just as the people of Jerusalem were predominantly okay with the cultural system of the day—for Jerusalem, after all, was the cultural hub for all of Israel.

And they weren’t ready for these other systems that worked for them to be changed… regardless of whether or not these same systems didn’t work for others.

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So the crowds that called Jesus a king on Sunday… called for his death on Friday. And though they put the Prince of Peace to death… just as Jesus predicted… God’s demand for peace and justice could not be silenced… as God resurrected the Prince of Peace to show a world hellbent on brokenness that, death or no death, God’s peaceable Kingdom will reign.

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And it is our call, friends, to pursue that peace. As followers of Christ, Jesus calls us to pursue and share the peace God’s Kingdom requires.

Amid a world that so values systems that create insiders and outsiders… haves and have-nots… the strong and the weak… Christ’s followers are called to courageously confront systems that work for some at the expense of others. Whether they are political, economic, cultural… or yes… even religious systems.

For the hard truth is… the need for peace is everywhere… everywhere there is the violence of war or disaster. But also everywhere there is the violence of poverty or corruption, bigotry or discrimination… and all the symptoms such brokenness reveals… amid abuse and gun violence and addiction and more.

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But the good news of this Palm Sunday… and frankly every day amid the Christian year… is that we—as God’s people—can live in pursuit of God’s peace knowing that, in God’s Kingdom… peace… will… reign.

We simply must summon the courage of our faith to see it… and then pursue it… here and now.

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As we’ve been exploring throughout these six Sundays in Lent… the distance between the lives we live and the lives to which God calls us can seem vast. Our world is not yet God’s peaceable kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

But as we live into the courage of our faith… and follow the models we have been exploring these past six weeks in Scripture…

* As we do more to seek grace and give grace…
* As we do more to let go of worldly expectations and embrace the change and growth God puts before us…
* As we ready ourselves to seek the help we need…
* And as we commit ourselves to pursuing the peace and justice God’s kingdom requires…

That distance, friends, rapidly shrinks.

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After all, when we endeavor to live into the courage of our faith…

When we seek grace and give grace… when we seek help and pursue peace not just for ourselves, but for all… we not only do this for God… we do it with God. Whose grace and love and peace are with us now… and always. Amen.