

I've read Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem many times. I have not, however, spent a whole of time dissecting the middle verses of Luke 19 which precede today's lection. Verse 11 leapt off the page at me:

As the disciples were listening to this, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed the Kingdom of God was to appear immediately.
Luke 19:11 (NRSV)

Luke's Jesus offers a redaction to Matthew's parable of the talents. In this version, a nobleman begins a journey to a faraway land to be commissioned with royal power. In his absence, he appoints ten servants to maintain his holdings and properties. And you know how the story goes: a few invest them wisely, and their savvy and courage results in exponential returns. Some of the stewards apply more moderate risk to their investments, but still have good returns. A few of the stewards hide away the monies, nothing ventured nor gained. Also, while this nobleman is away, his enemies are emboldened, and send a delegation to try and prevent his royal commissioning. They are unsuccessful, but their agitation expedites the nobleman's return.

The newly minted royal deals first with his servants. The investors are rewarded relative to their performance. The earners enjoy more. But the ones who stuff their money beneath the mattress are scolded. And their monies are given to the high earners. Their caution and fear of losing everything resulted in inaction, and it's their inaction that leads to the loss of the very thing they feared. And as for the agitators and resisters, well, they are disposed of.

Now, listen, I'm not trying to anoint this parable as a new motto for Sardis Baptist Church. It has its deficiencies to be sure! I have not, nor will I ever believe that God, or God's agents, be it Jesus or anyone else, will come circling back for us with Game of Thrones-style vengeance, or a rigid urgency, or an absolute litmus test to determine our righteousness. That may be what earthly judges do, but it's not what God does, because God is just, and God's just a whole lot bigger, and a whole lot more compassionate, and a lot more creative than our tired ways of thinking. I do, however, believe that we have some accountability and responsibility as created children of God, and as Jesus-followers.

So I think what Luke's Jesus is telling the disciples (and you and me, too) is that he's on a journey to be commissioned and anointed for God's purposes. And he's gonna be absent as God's inbreaking realm takes shape. In his absence, disciples are not simply custodians of the status quo. Every disciple has been gifted various resources, and they are to invest those resources into the betterment of our world. Jerusalem is a beginning, and not an ending.

And so it begins. In today's text, nearing Jerusalem, Jesus gives two of the disciples specific instructions to go ahead of the group, and secure an unriden colt, or donkey. Unriden makes it sacred or holy. A donkey is the exact opposite of the kind of animal a war-driven king might ride. Here comes Jesus down the hill into Jerusalem on an unremarkable being, not much bigger than himself. There is Pilate on the other side of town, high atop a warhorse, and trumpets blaring.

Pilate has seized power. The people's cheers are forced. And his entry is wholly conspicuous. His power is also wholly contingent upon maintaining the people's submission.

Jesus has been given a different kind of power. It's not necessarily a power that will be revealed or realized at the pace we'd prefer, nor is it something that can be taken. But it's there nonetheless.

I know today is Palm Sunday, but in Luke's version, the disciples following Jesus do not line the streets with palm branches, nor do they wave them in the air singing loud hosannas. (Don't worry, we're still going to do that today). Instead, they take their own cloaks, and line the donkey and the path Jesus follows. Sharon Ringe notes the importance of this action – clothing is a symbol of status. By removing their garments, the disciples are transferring their own representations of status, and giving them to Jesus. This isn't Pilate pulling the strings of domination. This is the people expressing the kingship they see before them.

Finally, the crowd begins to remember all the mighty acts of power they have been witness to as companions of Jesus: healings, prophecies, relationships, prayers, energy, etc. And they proclaim:

Blessed is the king
Who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
And glory in the highest heaven!
Luke 19:38 (NRSV)

It's nice to know that the disciples are able to recognize the nature of Jesus. And us, too, I suppose. But it's unlikely that they (or we) are ready to hear the parable. This new beginning is the end of what they've known. Yes, the kingdom is in motion, but it might not be something they recognize.

It's also worth noting that their insistence on the kingdom's quick arrival will increase their anxiety and fear in the aftermath of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death. They still sense that Caesar's jarring, numbing, and cruel response can alter what's already set in motion.

The Kingdom of God doesn't gallop. The Kingdom of God isn't serenaded by the king's trumpets. The Kingdom of God isn't all that conspicuous. The Kingdom seeps in, moment by moment, kind of like an unassuming Galilean, riding down a hill on a donkey, over top the cloaks of everyday people, proclaiming peace for the world, and love for every neighbor. If your eyes and ears are distracted by the tumult of the parade, you might not even notice Jesus' presence. And when the parade dust finally wears off Pilate and his cronies, they'll do all they can make you think they have the ability to expunge Jesus and the coming Kingdom he represents from existence.

At the top of that hill, we imagine a culmination, an ending, a decimal point where we can find contentedness. God's Kingdom on Earth. But it's more of an ellipsis. Jesus is inviting us to move the work forward. And maybe we find ourselves in a similar position to the one Isaiah occupied last week. The hilltop gives us a nice view of what will be, but we're still living in the middle of the not-yet.

Jesus bids us to pray, "Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done." During Lent, we've translated this imperative as sowing seeds of grace and peace. In other words, if we are going to be agents in this transformative process, we must invest our lives in it. We must get our hands dirty, tilling soil and planting seeds we might not ever see harvest. Today, high atop the Mount of Olives, we can imagine the harvest. Later in the week, down in the city, our hands and backs sore from labor, and winter closing fast, we may not have such clarity. And

we wonder if we can faith our way through the darkness of Friday and Saturday, and into the dawn of Sunday.

All we can do is take our first step down the hill toward Jerusalem. As we do, I think we would we be wise to remember the talents, or gifts, or skills, or createdness, or ruach that God has bestowed to each one of us. This is not the week to hide yourselves away. This is the week to share your giftedness. Jesus will need a cup of water, and help in carrying a heavy burden, and the presence of friends to see him through the ups and downs, and the hearts and minds of friends who choose to remember the giftedness he shared with them. In other words, there is grace and peace to sow and share, Sardis Baptist Church, and we have talent to do just that. And maybe, just maybe, as we follow in the steps of Jesus, we might also find a little Easter hope. They say it's the kind that can build a kingdom.

May it be so, and may it be soon. Amen!