



Palm Sunday is the day in the church year when traditionally we mark the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem for the last week of his life. **It's an event of great insight and great misunderstanding.**

It was interesting to see that the Lectionary reading for today leaves out verses 41-44, ignoring Jesus' words concerning crowd's misunderstanding of the events taking place. Instead, the suggested reading focuses on Jesus

being welcomed by the people into Jerusalem as Kings did when they would ride into the city to be enthroned. But to me, this way of cutting the text misrepresents what was happening on that first Palm Sunday.

What did the crowd of people gathered to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem miss? More importantly, what are we missing today as we wave our palm branches and sing praises to Jesus?

First, Luke tells us that Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. Jesus wept over the city because, they "did not know the time of your **visitation**." What is this visitation? This word is used very specifically in the Old Testament - the term "visitation" was used for God's coming to his people, either to **judge them or to save them**. For example, in Isaiah 29:5, the prophet says to the rebellious people;

"The multitude of your foes shall be like small dust . . . and in an instant suddenly, you will be **visited** by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and with a great noise."

When we look at the two places where this term "visitation" occurs in the rest of Luke we can see that the visitation meant the opposite. God visits to save his people through Jesus Christ. In Luke 1:68, Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, prophesies about Jesus and says,

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has **visited** and redeemed his people; he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."

And in Luke 7:16, after Jesus had just raised up a widow's son from the dead, the people in the village of Nain,

"People were seized with fear, and they glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has **visited** his people!'"

Therefore, when Jesus says to Jerusalem, "You did not know the time of your visitation," he means, "You did not know that my coming to you is the coming of God for your redemption, your salvation." What Jesus was signalling and bringing by riding on colt was the terms of peace – here the word is "shalom" – a reign of peace and justice on a

social, material and in a spiritual sense. Jesus chose to ride on an un-ridden colt to point to Zechariah 9:9-10;

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, **your king is coming to you**; He is just and **endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt**, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His kingship will be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

The crux of the misunderstanding that Jesus wept over was this - the divine visitation in Jesus was ushering in was salvation and redemption but because Jerusalem would persist in their old ways, so too would the judgment of God that was already upon them and the city. Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 19:43-44;

⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another;”

Jesus wept because He knew that people were waving the palms for King they thought they were getting. The people believed that Jesus was the second coming of David who ruled over their enemies with power and might. But the “things that make for peace” isn't a King whose way is paved with the ways of the sword. The way for “shalom” to be ushered in is through King who was willing to put his down his sword – not to continue the cycle of violence through the use of force, but through forgiveness and sacrifice, lay down his life for his people.

How about us?

How are we misinterpreting Jesus' coming?

I wonder how “instinctive” is it for any of us to truly believe that the “things that make for peace” is through the cross – a King who would ultimately choose his own suffering for the sake of others and even dying for the people who constantly misunderstood and would reject him.

I wonder if what we really want is King who would ride a white horse with swords strapped on to his powerful thighs, not a King who rides a foal of a donkey – a humble and sacrificial king.

I have been following with great interest and dismay the Republican Party Nominations. Few weeks ago, a republican candidate invited the star of hit show called “Duck Dynasty” to state that, “what made America great was the Bible and a Gun”, which he held up proudly to an adoring crowd of supporters. The political analysis offered following the event was that this event was designed to “appeal to the conservative evangelical Christian” voters.

Let us wave a palm branches for a humble King, riding a foal of a donkey.

Let us wave our palm branches for a suffering servant, who came not to conquer but to save.

Let us wave our palm branches for a King who came to die in our place and may our joyful praise echo into the Heavens and to the ends of the earth!