

## Luke 19:28-40

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

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” just say this: “The Lord needs it.”’ <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ <sup>34</sup>They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’ <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>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, <sup>38</sup>saying, ‘Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!’

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ <sup>40</sup>He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’

## Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

Last night I had the wonderful opportunity of really witnessing the power of Jesus’ proclamation from Mark as I talked with the children about sin and forgiveness the meaning of Easter, and I gave the children examples of sin and let them give me examples of sin, then I had them draw or write down their sins and put the slips of paper in the forgiveness box, and assure them that their sins were forgiven, and one young child came to me and confessed something mean he had done to his little brother, and asked if he was forgiven for it. I asked if he really sorry about it, and he said yes, and it was truly my pleasure to assure him that he was forgiven. That’s the gist of Jesus’ message: the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news. The time is fulfilled – God has come near, and he’s ready to embrace the sinner if he simply repent. It’s that easy, folks. And what a joy it is to hear those sweet words of forgiveness.

That was the first thing that Jesus did that turned the religious authorities against him; he forgave a man. The man was a paralytic, who was carried by his friends to be healed by Jesus. His friends had gone so far as to cut a hole in the roof of Jesus’ house to lower this man into the living room where Jesus could heal him. And Jesus tells the man, “Your sins are forgiven

you.” It doesn’t sound like a big deal to us, but there was a mechanism in place for forgiveness; you went to the temple, purchased a sacrifice, and gave it to a priest who proclaimed your sins forgiven. Jesus was breaking protocol, in fact it wasn’t even in Jesus’ jurisdiction to declare forgiveness; that was the realm of the priesthood. Now I didn’t bother explaining all of this to the young boy who had mistreated his younger brother, that it really wasn’t necessary that I forgive his sins, because I think it would have left him feeling perhaps assured of his forgiveness but not so assured as to the pastor’s communication skills.

But that was the scandalous thing that Jesus was doing; forgiving, and teaching his disciples to forgive and be forgiven by one another. What a radical idea! And people were like, “No way. It can’t be this easy!” Jesus says, “Yes, it can.” The priests said, “No it can’t,” and a line was drawn in the sand, and as Jesus became more popular, he became a greater threat to those who profited from bestowing forgiveness in the name of God. Only God and the people against whom you’ve sinned need to be involved in the forgiveness process, and the whole transaction is free. And God has no desire for us to carry around the burden of sin or of guilt for any length of time. It’s not only for our benefit that he wants us to shed the weight of our sin and be assured forgiveness; it’s for his benefit as well because it draws us closer to him which is exactly where he wants us to be, ever closer to him and closer to one another as forgiveness goes viral.

Repent and believe the good news. Your sins are forgiven forever and for free. And when you imagine a whole community of people, followers of Jesus, who not only forgive but are forgiven by one another and by God, there is an incredible feeling of liberation, as our communion liturgy so eloquently puts it, we are “freed for joyful obedience.” We no longer bear the weight of sin, and with forgiveness our enemies disappear, and fear and hate are replaced by peace and love.

Which does lead to today’s first reading, the account of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The people are waving palms and shouting, “Hosanna.” In four days they’ll be shouting “Crucify him!” it’s completely predictable. Jesus is coming to establish the Kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of David. Jesus wants a world free of hostility and oppression. Those who call themselves his disciples want a world free of Roman domination. Jesus is not going to lead a bloody insurrection that will displace one brutal government with another brutal government. But if Jesus is truly going to bring about God’s kingdom, he must boldly confront the powers of this world and the mindset that we must compete with one another to gain power over others. Jesus must confront them, but he has not come with sword or gun or cruise missile or drone. He’s come simply to declare God’s reign of love and forgiveness.

And while the powers of this world can threaten us, frighten us, even terrorize us, we can be freed from those fears. We need not let ourselves be slaves to fear of death, because in God’s kingdom there is eternal life. What else is there when you’re in God’s presence? God is the author of life. God is eternal. God is life.

Last year we began a visioning process, which is continuing even though we haven't met as a visioning team since last summer. Vision begins with an understanding of God's kingdom, a place where there is forgiveness and reconciliation with one another and with God. Vision is what compels us to face the sin of this world and declare Jesus Christ's victory over that sin. Vision is what compelled Jesus to ride into Jerusalem that day, knowing that he would be worse than killed in a matter of days, but also assured of his place in eternity, and assured that you and I and so many others would continue the process of transforming the world into a place more closely resembling the perfect world that God created, a world free of sin, free of hatred, free of fear, free of strife.

That is the essence of our vision. The question that remains is, "How do we maximize our effect on this world?" And that involves doing the best we can with the people next to us and with the gifts we have to effect what matters to God the most. We have plenty of directions we can take. But whatever direction we take should be the direction Christ is leading us. Today Jesus rides boldly into Jerusalem, directly into the face of his enemies, because that's where he maximizes his effect on this world, and he continues to effect this world as we who claim to be his disciples do the same sort of thing that he does, facing those who would oppose the kingdom of God, who would compromise God's promise, who would rather us fear them than love them.

Today Jesus rides into Jerusalem to face those who oppose him. What is our Jerusalem, and who are those who oppose us? What are the issues we must face? Who are those who declare themselves our enemies, and how do we bring the good news to them? May God grant us the courage to ride, to speak, to act, and to believe. Amen.