

6th Lent Palm/Passion Sunday 4-13-14

Palms Procession, Reading of Passion, Andy Youth Service Blitz

Boone Methodist, Jason Byassee

Strange King

Luke 19:28-41

Well, first I need to thank Cassidy the donkey for making an appearance in our worship today.¹ Wise observers have noted that donkeys have a cross shape on their back, where the Son of God marked them with his presence forever. Palm Sunday is a riot, a passionate celebration, a festival, a parade, it's ridiculous, it's Jesus meets Mardi Gras plus the Superbowl, it's big and over the top. Thank you to the Haas family for the animal, to our musicians and choirs for their gift of song, thank you to the trees for the palm branches, thank you God for the music and the parade and everything.

But then Palm Sunday pivots and becomes Passion Sunday. By the end of the service today I'll have read Jesus' passion narrative, the story of God's death for us. It will be dark and solemn and sad as the light of the world winks out. And in that way this Sunday is a little like our lives. Unbearably beautiful highs and unspeakably awful lows. God has gone through both for us.

I wonder what the best parade you ever saw was? There's still something magic about them. Boone's various parades during the year on King Street with the cloggers and the candy and the cars. I've heard about the parades in this town when App beat Michigan, when Osama bin Ladin was killed. I'm also told that on St. Patrick's Day people in Ireland turn on the TV to watch the parade in New York.² Parades are an All-American thing—here's General Washington in triumph.³ Of course others like parades too, here's an early Nazi one. Parades can be dismal—the people of Israel were carted in parade to Babylon for exile, each person hooked to another with a fish hook, their king blinded, his family slaughtered, the worst moment for God's people. Today, Jesus parades into Jerusalem, acclaimed as king. And we'll remember that with another little parade now. Friends let us stand in the presence of our king.

28 After Jesus said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it'."

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They replied, "The Lord needs it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes

¹ <http://www.originalatv.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Donkey-Cross.jpg>

² <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3b50000/3b52000/3b52200/3b52247r.jpg>

³³³ http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02289/Berlin-olympic-ope_2289190b.jpg

down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” 40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

This is the word of God, it belongs to you, the people of God, **thanks be to God.**

This is quite a parade. Jesus is hailed as king of Israel. A few days later that same crowd will demand that the Romans crucify him. It’s important to note what sort of parade this is. It is not, how do we put it, awesome. We might have expected Jesus to look like Washington, the conquering hero.⁴ Here’s a famous image of Napoleon, dashing on his horse, leading armies to take over all of Europe near about. But Cassie the donkey is not a war horse. And Jesus is not that kind of ruler. He’s humble, riding on a donkey. On a colt, the foal of a donkey. Israel’s scripture promised a humble king on a simple animal.⁵ Imagine Jesus bouncing around on an animal that barely keeps his feet off the ground. This is a little bit like us waiting for a presidential inauguration, a motorcade, a limo, the full entourage. And then the new president rides up on a stolen tricycle, looking more than a little ridiculous. Not what we expect from our rulers. But then Jesus is a strange sort of king.

No time today to say much. I’ll start with this. This might be Jesus’ least impressive miracle. This is a guy who’s always going around and shazam! Doing awesome stuff. Here’s bread for 5000! Here’s healing for someone sick for decades. Hey lemme sashay out on that water. A dead kid? No problem. The grave? I can handle this. Here Jesus needs a donkey. Actually not a grownup donkey but its male child, tiny, never even carried anybody before. And Jesus says, hey, disciples, head into town, find a donkey, when you untie it someone will say “why’re you doing that?” Say “the master needs it.” It happens exactly that way. Not exactly miraculous. Go and steal something. When the owner complains say, hey, the owner of heaven and earth needs his baby donkey back, ok? And that’s what happens. Now, you or I could not heal or walk on water or explode the grave. But we could probably guess if we tried to steal somebody’s car, even a small unimpressive one, someone would say, uh, don’t do that. Even being a decent guesser could pull off this miracle.

Jesus always is ambivalent about miracles. He can do them but he hesitates. Will we treat him like a magician? Like an ATM machine doling out cash? Or will we worship him? Be his friend? Be like him? He doesn’t want fame. Jesus wants our hearts. And miracles, surprisingly, aren’t the best way to get our hearts. This is: Jesus turns what we expect upside down. He’s a king on a little donkey. He’s a ruler on a cross. He’s a God in a tomb.

⁴ http://queenanneboleyn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/napoleon-horse_1614174a.jpg

⁵ <http://valtorta.org/images/GiottoTriumphalEntry.jpg>

Meeting with some of you like I do Wednesday nights to prepare for today we talked about what the crowds say.⁶ “38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And one of you said, hey, it sounds like Christmas time. And sure enough, the angels that day say⁷ “14 ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’ The king who was born in a barn is now the ruler who reigns from a donkey. Jesus is consistently a strange king.⁸ Another of you thought of Mary bouncing along on a donkey nine months pregnant before that birth in Bethlehem. When a donkey shows up in the bible pay attention. Cassie isn’t just marked with Jesus’ cross. She teaches us about the humble God we follow in Jesus. Good things happen midweek around here. Especially this week. I’d love to see you all on Wednesday to wash feet and hear great singing, Thursday for our Last Supper play, Friday for our preaching and worship service on Christ’s Seven Last Words. And then next Sunday our greatest feast of the year. Let’s follow this strange king all the way to his cross.

Here’s another strange thing about Jesus. He accepts our praise. His opponents tell him to shush us. We cry out our king! Our God! Celebrate! And when he’s told to stop us he says if I tell them to stop the very rocks will cry out. I wonder what that would be like? Would they grow mouths first? Form a rock choir? Shame us with how loud and how beautifully they sing? It’s a funny image.⁹ But then you realize, wait, the rocks do cry out. Every single rock out there reminds us of the rock of ages, Jesus. We all moved here at some point or stayed here because these rocks cry out with Jesus’ glory. It’s what makes it worth getting out of bed in the morning this time of year in the High Country. Just like every donkey’s back acclaim our king so every rock shouts hallelujah.

Now a quick word about that. In Lent we’re not supposed to say the h word, hallelujah. The choir worried about their wonderful anthem, if they say “hallelujah” are they breaking a church rule? Fear not, whatever we give up in Lent we can do on Sundays. This is why Lent is not a diet, you can take off one day in seven. So on Sunday, resurrection day even in Lent we’re like the rocks. We can’t help ourselves. We say hallelujah. Say it with me, go ahead, hallelujah. God smiles. We’ll really shout it next week.

So Jesus accepts our praise as our king. But then he changes what we mean by king. He doesn’t lord over us, make us behave, or conquer anybody. He spreads out his arms and dies for the whole world. Scholars say the two things that most likely got Jesus killed are this procession, his acting like King of Israel, and then his demonstration in the temple, turning the tables over. You alienate the government, the religious leaders, and the business leaders and you don’t have much left. Jesus does all three in an afternoon. And then he dies for us.

⁶ Luke 19:38 on screen plz

⁷ Luke 2:14 on screen plz

⁸ http://bigiufan29.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/jesus_mary_joseph.jpg

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http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_TkKZZyzUvio/TKgb6wZ5yZl/AAAAAAAAEEg/oHHYdOBg5F4/s1600/Rocks+would+cry+out+3.jpg

A strange king this one. Stranger still that he goes to his death unafraid. He must be aware there's something beyond that cross, something beyond that grave, something beyond that hell he goes through for us. And that he's going to take us there with him. Soon. Very soon. Amen.