

**+ Luke 19:37-38 + Journey to the Cross: The Final Journey +  
+ 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion + 28 March 2010 +**

Every journey must come to an end. I wonder if that thought crossed Jesus' mind at all as he crested the ridge of the Mount of Olives and beheld the holy city of Jerusalem below. He could see everything. Herod's temple gleamed in the afternoon sun and the streets bustled with throngs of Passover pilgrims from all over the known world. None of that, however, distracted the focus of the humble King sitting atop borrowed cloaks on the back of a donkey, because Jerusalem meant suffering and death. As the all-knowing God, perhaps he already saw the home with an upper room, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Sanhedrin meeting-place, the palace of the Roman governor, and a skull-shaped hill just outside a gate on the other side of the city. As glorious as Jerusalem appeared, what was about to happen would be greater. ***"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** This was no ordinary king and no ordinary journey. The end was coming soon.

The ragtag procession of disciples following and praising Jesus was growing as pilgrims and citizens alike joined the joyful parade. Men threw down their cloaks to "prepare" the road for the coming King. Young people chopped down palm branches for people to wave and lay down on the King's path. They had seen Jesus heal a blind man and raise Lazarus from the dead and his other miracles. They wondered if this was the Messiah, God's Anointed, long-promised from of old, so they sang an ancient song. ***"Hosanna!"***, they sang. "Lord, save us please!" ***"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** He received a royal welcome, but Jesus was no ordinary king.

We, and the rest of the world, would expect Christ the King to be the conquering hero, the mighty Lord, the tough general who's going to bring victory by sheer force of will, the king who will bring glory to his people, but that's not Jesus. Yes, on Palm Sunday, he entered Jerusalem to great praise and royal honor, but Jesus wasn't coming for the glory and power.

Jesus came in gentleness and humility—not traits you would expect in a conquering hero. As a direct descendant of King David (Israel's ancient royal line) and the Son of God, Jesus had every right to enter Jerusalem with pomp and circumstance. He had every right to enter the gates of Zion on the saddled back of a noble steed with glory and power, a mighty army behind him, a sword at his side and a scepter in his hand. He had every right to regain the throne of his ancestor David and restore Israel.

...But Jesus was no ordinary king. His own followers expected pomp and glory, but Jesus rode into Jerusalem, sitting not on a finely tooled saddle, but the coats of his disciples. He rode into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt, the foal of a donkey, the most common of animals, not some mighty war horse. He entered Jerusalem not bearing sword or scepter, but simply the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. He came not to regain David's throne through a bloody grab for power crushing anyone who stood in his path to glory, nor to establish an earthly kingdom with vengeance in his heart.

No, Jesus came in gentleness and humility to overthrow the dark forces of sin, Satan and death to save the sons and daughters of men. Jesus came not to shed the blood of men, but for men his blood to be shed. He came in humility and peace to save even the lowliest and the littlest. That meant suffering and death on a cross—a criminal's execution. That meant awful things for our Savior. In Jesus, we don't see the mighty Lion of Judah, but the Lamb of God going uncomplaining forth to die. Yes, we see a king, but we see him come in gentleness to suffer and die for us. We see his passion to save us from the condemnation our sins deserve.

That's what's even more remarkable. As all-knowing God, Jesus knew what was coming. He knew what suffering and pangs of hell and death awaited him on that final journey, but still he crested that ridge and made that final journey to the cross. Why? St. Paul explains in Romans 5:(8), ***"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** It was grace—that undeserved, incomprehensible, undying, endless love of God for sinners like us—that brought about this whole journey in the first place from Eden to empty tomb.

Long ago it was grace in the Garden of Eden that moved the holy God to promise that One would come to crush the serpent's head, in spite of the rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve. It was grace that moved the Lord to keep that promise alive and make every provision for the final journey of his Son, so that ***"when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4:4-5)

It was grace that moved God's Son to leave his heavenly throne and take our place humbly in the womb of a young virgin named Mary. It was grace that led to his birth as a tiny infant nine months later in the stench of a lowly stable in the town of Bethlehem. It was grace that took Jesus through infancy and childhood and adolescence until he reached the age of adulthood. It was grace that took Jesus to the banks of the Jordan River, where he was baptized by John the Baptizer, not for his own sins, but **"to fulfill all righteousness"** (Matthew 3:15) for us. It was grace that took Jesus out into the wilderness to fight Satan and his temptations. It was grace that took Jesus through times of popularity and times of opposition, but after three years of public ministry, **"as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."** (Luke 9:51) It was grace all along.

It was grace that brought Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was grace that moved Jesus to withstand verbal attack after attack as he taught his final lessons in the temple courts. It was grace that moved Jesus to become the servant and wash the feet of foolish, prideful disciples like us. It was grace that moved Jesus to command his beloved disciples to **"love one another"** (John 13:34) and to institute his Holy Supper to keep giving himself, body and blood, with bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

It was grace that brought him out to the Garden of Gethsemane, to endure betrayal and arrest and abandonment as his disciples ran for their lives. It was grace that moved Jesus to endure suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, the temple guards, the Roman soldiers, and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. It was grace that kept the struggling Savior going beneath the cross as he carried it to his death. It was grace that allowed the soldiers to pound nails into his hands and feet, the crowds to ridicule him, and forgiveness to flow from his lips. It was grace that moved Jesus to shout his final triumphant cry, **"It is finished"** (John 19:30) and give up his spirit in death. It was grace that tore the temple curtain separating the holy God and sinful men. It was grace that cracked the tombs open at Jesus' death. It was grace that put him in our tomb and it is grace that brings forth a new song—not the Palm Sunday song of expectation, but the song of victory and salvation on Easter.

It is the grace of the gentle, humble, willing King that takes our breath away during Holy Week as we watch the Savior do exactly what we would not, but what he had to do to save us according to his Father's holy will. Now we could get caught up in the expectant praise of Palm Sunday, but the best is yet to come as the Savior wins for us **"peace in heaven"** and eternal life.

It's now time to watch it all play out to the bitter and glorious end. The last hosannas disappear. The colt goes home. The broken palm branches turn brown as they litter the street. The Savior turns toward the cross, but the best is yet to come. **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** Amen.