

Throw Your Coat on the Road

Psalm 119: 1-2, 19-29

Luke 3: 7-14

Luke 19: 29-40

April 10, 2022-Palm Sunday

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Psalm 119: 1-2, 19-29

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Luke 3: 7-14

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages."

Luke 19: 29-40

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 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, saying,

'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

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

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High school friends Rob and Mike went to their local grocery store with \$400 in their pockets. The money wasn't intended for them to buy groceries for themselves but instead to surprise 15 shoppers by buying their groceries for them. It's easy to imagine the line of carts and shocked shoppers as they realized these strangers had just paid for their groceries, and for no other reason than they wanted to go out and be nice to people.

A few years ago a couple in Natick MA, returned home and discovered that their rainbow flag had been stolen and their front porch pelted with eggs. In response, more than 40 houses in the neighborhood hung brilliantly colored declarations of pride and unity, lining fences, porches, garages, doorways, and on decks. The rainbow flag at our church was taken down and replaced with a bigger one.

Days into the bloody, brutal invasion into Ukraine, fleeing Ukrainian parents who traveled over the border found welcome, support and solidarity from Polish mothers who had left a line of strollers filled with food, clothes and baby supplies waiting at the train station to be taken and used by the newly arrived refugees.

A line of paid groceries, a line of affirmation and unity, a line of compassion and solidarity, each a sign of extravagant generosity, a way of expressing honor, respect, care and presence, each a way of saying, “I see you; you matter.” For those who paid for the groceries of strangers, those who hung rainbow flags, and those who left strollers and baby supplies, it was a recognition and an active response to a need. These were not casual little murmurs in the background but an involved, meaningful reply to what was happening around them.

These were, as John the Baptist would say, “.....be fruits worthy of repentance. Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.”

As John announced the coming of the Messiah and prepared the way for him, his message was bold and clear. Do not sit on the sidelines and just wait. Be ready—ready heart, mind and soul. See those around you in need, recognize them, and respond. Be active in your waiting—active in the ways that show you are worthy of redemption, worthy of a Messiah, and not just by the default of your bloodline and faith heritage of Abraham. God chose Abraham and as he had awaited the fulfillment of God's promises he acted just as God called him to do. John told his followers they were no different. Act in the worthy ways God has called you to do. Share generously with your coat and with your food for those in need. Do not hold back---be generous, empathetic, caring and compassionate. That is fruit worthy of repentance, of redemption, that is the line that matters, that is the worthy path that matters.

The One who John had prepared the way for through his baptism and his teachings is now preparing to enter Jerusalem where the crowds praise him as the king sent from the Lord, the One who brings peace and glory from the highest heaven. As they bind the festal parade with branches, they bless God that they are being saved. They cheer and praise who they think Jesus is and will be--a great political and military leader who will free them from the oppression and tyranny of the Roman Empire. They do yet see that the kingdom of God is not of this world but rather is a spiritual kingdom that is even now growing in the hearts of people who put their faith and trust in God.

The crowds would have known the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, and recognized his words becoming reality in their midst, words spoken after long decades of yearning for restoration and peace when the Temple had been destroyed and the people scattered in exile.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The message of the psalmist would have also echoed throughout their joyful parade, throughout Jesus' triumphal entry, on this wonderful day which the Lord had made and on which they were indeed glad and rejoicing as they blessed the One coming in the name of the Lord.

Inspired by the cloaks that the two disciples had placed on the bareback colt as an honorary saddle, the crowd in a collective act of chivalry, admiration, honor, love, loyalty, reverence and submission to royalty, laid a generous and worthy ground path of their own coats, their own outer tunics. Their new king was given an easier, more comfortable path to travel.

John the Baptist had taught the people how to wait actively for the Messiah, and now they greet the Messiah with the humble and generous sharing of their coats, and in the waving of palm branches--a then traditional way to celebrate kings and conquerors.

In *their* excitement, enthusiasm and exuberance the crowds held nothing back, as they generously offered to Jesus, offered to their new king, all of their emotions and all of their resources.

In *our* excitement, enthusiasm and exuberance as we come to Holy Week, as we wave our palm branches in honor of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as we prepare for the walk and the work, the pain and the power, the admiration and the agony of this week that will joyfully become the glory of resurrection on Easter, are we as free spirited as our faith ancestors, or do we hold back our emotions and our resources?

Do we fear looking foolish, so we hold our faith, our joy, our praise, our generosity, in rather than share it? Do we observe the parade, the praise and celebration of our faith story in Jesus from a distance, and hold our coat tightly close to us?

I invite us to take in the words of Jill Duffield,*to truly enter into Holy Week, to throw our coat onto the ground in front of Jesus with lavish generosity, praise and reverence, to join the line and the parade. "Palm Sunday is no time to hold back. Shout with abandon. Praise Jesus with song and prayer. Throw your coat into the mix, spread it on the road. Do not suppress your urge to be generous with your affection, your resources, your love. Jesus will not walk the earth forever. The time is now." Amen.

* Duffield, Jill. *Lent in Plain Sight: A Devotion Through Ten Objects*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2020, p141 and used with permission.