

The Last Week of an Old World

Thomas Robinson, *Palm Sunday*, April 14, 2019

Matthew 21:1-17 [Cf. Mk 11:1-17; Lk 19:28-46; Jn 12:12-19]

¹ Now when they were almost at Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² instructing them, “Go straight ahead to that village, and right there you’ll find a donkey tied with her colt. Untie them and lead them to me. ³ If anyone objects, say, ‘Their Lord needs them,’ and they’ll send them at once.”

⁴ This happened so that what was said through the prophet would be filled up:

⁵ “Say to the *daughter of Zion*, [Isa 62:11]

‘Look, your king is coming to you, ...

humble, and riding on a donkey and on a colt of a pack animal.’” [Zech 9:9]

⁶ When the disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them, ⁷ they brought the donkey and colt and laid cloaks over them, and he rode on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their own cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. [2Kg 9:13; 2Mac 10:7]

⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting,

“Hosanna (Save us, we pray) to the Son of David!” [Psa 118:25]

Blessed is the one who comes in the LORD’s name!” [Psa 118:26; Mt 23:39]

Save us, we pray (Hosanna) in the highest realms!” [Psa 148:1]

¹⁰ When he entered into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken, saying, “Who is this?”

¹¹ But the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.” ¹² And Jesus entered into the temple and threw out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the work-tables of the money-changers and the seats of those selling doves [Zech 14:21].

¹³ He said to them, “It is written,

‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ [Isa 56:7]

but you’re making it *‘a cave of bandits.’*” [Jer 7:11]

¹⁴ Blind and lame people came to him in the temple, and he healed them [2Sam 5:8]. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things he did and the children in the temple crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant. ¹⁶ And they said to him, “Do you hear what they’re saying?”

But Jesus said to them, “Yes! Haven’t you ever read,

‘Out of the babbling of infants and nursing babies

you arranged a song of praise?’” [Psa 8:2]

¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Sunday – Jesus enters Jerusalem as the king who is also a servant riding a donkey. He confronts the corruption of the temple commerce and challenges the chief priests and scribes (Mt).

Monday – **Tuesday** – Jesus teaches intensively in the temple, refusing the authority of the chief priests. He condemns the Sadducees’ disbelief in resurrection and the Pharisees’ rigorist interpretation of Torah. When Jesus leaves the temple, he foresees its ruin and the unexpected inbreaking of God’s kingdom.

Wednesday – Jesus remains in Bethany. At a meal with his friends, a woman anoints Jesus’ head with fragrant oil. Some are upset, but Jesus says she has anointed his body for burial. Judas conspires to betray Jesus.

Thursday – Jesus arranges for the evening Passover feast. There, Jesus announces that a disciple will betray him. Still, he washes the feet of all twelve and shares bread and wine with them all as his body and blood. Jesus calls them to love each other. Knowing the difficulties they face, he prays for them. They go to Gethsemane where he prays in agony, alone knowing what he faces, while the disciples sleep, unaware of his struggle.

Friday – During the night Jesus is arrested. He is questioned by priests and tried before Pilate. He seems completely powerless as he is betrayed and crucified in shame outside Jerusalem. He’s laid in a nearby tomb.

Saturday – Sabbath. The disciples are filled with grief, disappointment. Is the kingdom lost again to death?

Luke 19: 41-44

⁴¹ And as he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If only you, even you, right down to this day, had known the things that make for peace! But now they’re still hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For days will come upon you, when your enemies will besiege you all around and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they won’t leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” [Luke 1:68; Gen 50:24]

Matthew 23:37-39

³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you won’t see me again, until you say, “*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*” [Psa 118:26]

The Turning of the Ages

Our modern world knows when the ages turned – Galileo, Newton, Enlightenment, French Rev. Breaking ecclesiastical domination, free thought, human autonomy. Important! But that eccl. domination had domesticated & hid the great revolution, the truly new age that we celebrate: Easter when God breaks in to overcome the ultimate power of death and create new life. Palm Sunday and all this week sets the stage. Death is still master. Hopes blossom. A long history feeds anticipation with prophetic poetry. Imperial oppression holds in boiling resentments. Aristocratic religious leaders are threatened by the very faith they’re supposed to foster. Religio-political groups propose ways of reform. The crowds long for Passover deliverance! A young prophet from Galilee, riding a donkey, comes over the hill and sees the city and temple and weeps over it. He sees things others can’t yet see. He is someone more than they imagine.

How Do You Recognize a King?

The Passover crowds recognize Jesus’ action from scripture. The King/Messiah who’s also humble like a servant. They want and welcome a King: palms, cloaks, Hosannas, “Son of David”? Could he really be the one? The city quakes all week with the question. The temple commerce is overthrown. Children shout and sing. Blind and lame come for healing. But the chief priests, God’s ministers, see and hear only danger to the old world they lead. “Son of David”? Really!? No one really sees what’s coming. But the crowds and children and blind see God’s doing something. They long for it. God takes baby babbling and turns it to praise. Jesus teaches in the temple and challenges Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, all who controlled God. They’re blind to God’s power or claim to define God’s will and control others. He speaks of facing death in a way that even his followers can’t square with a new Kingdom rule. Jesus sees the entire leadership of Herod’s temple, empty of God and headed to violent ruin. He leaves it behind. At a dinner, a woman anoints Jesus. Some object. Jesus points to his death.

Human Empires and the Kingdom of God

Judas signed on for a victorious kingdom, not a dead prophet. He plans to hand over the deluded Jesus to the temple authorities, who’ll give him to the Roman governor. The Romans work like all human empires till today. Death, war, execution, threat is the ultimate control. You can’t be a king when you’re dead. If people want to overthrow our rule, stop them with death. Jesus plans for Passover, feast of deliverance from death by death. Temple & empire are both willing to take their chance that death will stop this prophet. Jesus takes the disciples, even betrayer deeper into “my body...blood,” into love that serves, into overcoming the world.

What’s Really Happening?

Jesus acts to create a new world of grace that is open to human faith, love, freedom. Do you see it? Will you follow it? We see the evil, injustice of crucifixion. Can it be God’s self-giving love? Saturday, death has won! Trusting a dead king is like baby babbling. Can God turn it to praise, life?