

A Different Kind of King (Palm Sunday, 10Apr22)  
Luke 19:29-40

“‘God has given us a King!’ they exulted. ‘Long live the King!’” (Luke 19:38a, Living Bible)

We may wonder about these exultant multitudes: were they wrong? *Had* God given them a king? Jesus certainly wasn’t going to be long-lived.

Was it wishful thinking? Sometimes we’re told that they wanted Jesus to be an old-timey Messiah, to come storming in to take over Jerusalem like the warrior king David.

That view also goes with a common narrative that the crowds who sang Hosanna Sunday cried Crucify on Friday, that since Jesus wasn’t what they wanted, in disappointment they turned against him, or were stirred up by powerful agitators to do so.

There’s another sense that the people waving palms and laying down cloaks as Jesus entered the holy city weren’t exactly *wrong*, it’s just they weren’t fully correct. Jesus was a king, but not the usual kind of king.

Maybe they should’ve noticed he was riding a humble donkey instead of a mighty white warhorse, for example.

Justo Gonzalez does some nice explaining of this. He writes, “Triumphal entries were common enough to be recognized...and rare enough to retain their sense of the extraordinary...Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem both parallels such solemn entries and contrasts with them. People acclaim him as earlier their ancestors acclaimed Alexander [the Great, the Greek emperor who conquered most of the Mediterranean] ...[Jesus] does not wear a [victor’s] crown of laurel, but soon will wear a crown of thorns. Alexander rejoiced over his conquests; Jesus will weep over Jerusalem. Alexander—a Gentile—entered the temple and, with the acquiescence of its authorities, sacrificed in it. Jesus will enter the temple and denounce what is being done in it.”\*

That may confirm for us being uncomfortable referring to Jesus as a king. If we’d even prefer to

avoid the image, still those exultant people lining the road around him shouted and sang and praised, “God has given us a King! Long live the King!”

But maybe they weren’t mistaken or short-sightedly fickle or foolish in wishful thinking. Maybe they recognized Jesus.

After all, they were praising God for all the miracles and deeds of power they had seen. And these aren’t just random crowds; a more literal translation describes them as the “the whole multitude of the disciples” (NRSV). In Luke’s telling, disciple is not a term of disparagement but of affinity. They have been following Jesus and know who he is. They know his healing, his caring, his including, his forgiving, his restoring. From his first preaching, he has been bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, recovering sight, freeing the oppressed, proclaiming God’s favor (4:18-19), struggling on behalf of life. These disciples know this and know that’s what we need. It’s a good chance they are following him and supporting him and exulting him precisely because they know this about him.

Sure, this week won’t go probably how they anticipated. But that’s not because they wanted Jesus to become a typical king. They liked and needed him as he was. The kind of king who would serve. The kind of king who wouldn’t be boastful on a big horse, but humble on a donkey. The kind of king, as I read this week, in early centuries of artwork who rather than a cushioned throne was pictured on a folding chair.\*\* The kind of king for them, not against.

The disciples knew what they wanted and needed. The early Christians knew what they wanted and needed. “God has given us a King,” a different kind of king, and this week—though seeming to cut him short—will prove that his reign is forever. And so today, we also find our place in this movement, and our own place with palm branches waving and voices calling out.

The Poor People’s Campaign is a continuation of what Martin Luther King was working on when he was killed 54 years ago this week. At a Madison rally two weeks ago there was great music lifting

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\* Luke, p226-27

\*\* “Dura Europas Revisited,” Paul Post, *Worship* vol86, no5, p240

voices, movement songs like: Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, Turn me 'round, turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody, turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin', marching up to freedom land.

OR Everybody's got a right to live / Everybody's got a right to live / And before this campaign fails / We'll all go down to jail / Everybody's got a right to live

OR Oh, freedom / Oh, freedom / Oh, freedom over me / And before I'd be a slave / I'd be buried in my grave / And go home to my Lord / And be free\*\*\*

Those songs could've fit well along the streets with those exulting Jesus as king, insisting on the struggle for life. Or the populist pressures of Palm Sunday for you may associate more with protest chants and shouts. Give it a go:

Tell me what the kingdom of God looks like!  
This is what the kingdom of God looks like!

What do we want? A different king! When do we want it? Now!

I say death, you say life. Death—life!

There you go. I think you've got it. And if you were quiet, the stones would cheer you on.

Hymn: O Christ, What Can It Mean for Us (ELW 431)

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\*\*\* [https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SON001\\_Songbook\\_2019\\_V2-LR.pdf](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SON001_Songbook_2019_V2-LR.pdf)