

Palm Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Luke 19:28-40

Contemplatio: Michael Wood. The joy of being a donkey

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### Brief reflections

Jesus culmination of his earthly ministry occurs in Jerusalem. Earlier in Luke's gospel we heard these words:

<sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." <sup>32</sup> He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me,<sup>[a]</sup> 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. <sup>33</sup> Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' <sup>34</sup> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when<sup>[b]</sup> you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jerusalem has very ambiguous symbolism. On one hand, Jerusalem was, for Jews, was the Axis Mundi – the axis around which the cosmos revolved. It was where God touched the earth and humans met God. It was the place of worshipping God rather than idols. And yet, Jesus says that Jerusalem was also the place which stoned prophets – the place which most betrayed God, through the distortions of temple trading – the buying and selling which exploited poor widows and regulated and controlled access to God. When the prophets challenge such corruptions they had to be silenced.

Jerusalem is also a symbol of the complexity of our own psyches. A friend of mine describes the psyche as an inner village, comprised of multiple interests and needs. Just like in the physical city of Jerusalem, part of us welcomes Jesus and wants Jesus to find a home in us, but other parts of us don't want the necessary dying that would go with this. Alongside the part of us which says, 'ma-ra-na-tha' (Come Lord, Jesus), other parts of us are denying Jesus with our inner angers and betrayals and addictions. We notice this most keenly in meditation. We only need to be saying our prayer word (ma-ra-na-tha) for a micro-second before all these other parts of the psyche are hi-jacking our prayer. Our psyche is Jerusalem into which Jesus is entering. In Jerusalem we are crucified with Christ and raised with him.

How is it that Jesus is borne into the city of Jerusalem within us? He is always borne on a donkey.

The story is clearly picking up an image from the prophet Zechariah 9:9

"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Jesus is not borne into our city on a war horse like the kings of old returning from military battle (Psalm 24:7). Jesus's battles have been of a different kind. Jesus is returning to Jerusalem after battling demons in the wilderness and casting out demons in people's lives, so that they might be

healed and liberated. Jesus victories have been through simple teaching and healing, and now he returns without any of the symbols of a conquering military army.

This donkey , upon which Jesus now rides, has needed to be released to the ones *sent* by Jesus to release it. The donkey is a symbol of the future work of the apostles (apostle means 'sent one') who will, in every generation, carry Jesus into the Jerusalems of this world – whether that be cities or psyches. The current failure of the church in Russia to say no to Putin is a failure of apostleship – a failure to accept the cost of dying – a failure by the church's apostles to be imprisoned or killed by Putin. To paraphrase today's gospel, "only in the Kremlin can the prophets be killed". The donkey upon which they needed to ride into the Kremlin has somehow been tethered by inner voices of fear – voices of self preservation.

What about the Jerusalem of our psyche's? Who have been the donkeys who have carried Jesus to us? Maybe they didn't care to be called donkeys but they were, because of the humility and service of their lives – they were ones who showed us something of the character of Jesus and the possibilities of true peace and joy in our lives.

And in what ways might we say, by the grace of the Spirit, that we are donkeys to others? What would it mean to us to carry Jesus into Holy Week for others?