

STUDY 6

**The 'Triumphant' Approach to Jerusalem
Luke 19: 28-40**

READ the passage.

Jot down what you think it is about.

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Thinking About How You Read The Passage

This was street theatre and a march. The people had the equivalent of banners, and the sort of chants set up by those who work up the crowds at political rallies.

How do you feel about protests, street theatre, and political rallies?

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If this happened on your street, blocked your traffic, and caused this commotion, how do you think you would react?

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Thinking About Luke 19:28-40 With Our Partners

To our partners: If you had a chance to talk to the writer of this story what would you want to ask?

They replied: Why did Jesus choose a colt that has never been ridden? What was the reaction of the owners to the response 'the master needs it'? Did the owner follow them? Why did the people spread their cloaks on the road? Why did the Pharisees tell Jesus to silence the disciples, when they could have done that? What was the reaction of the Pharisees when Jesus replied to them? How were they able to

write the entire book? Did you ever get any sign or feel that Jesus, who was going triumphantly on that day, was going towards the cross, towards suffering?

Are these the sort of questions you would want to ask? Are there any surprising or helpful questions that enhance your reading of the passage?

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To the partners: 'What would you want to know about this event that might help you live?'

Our partners would want to know about: the reactions of the owner of the colt, the intentions of the crowd, and the hidden motives of the Pharisees when they put Jesus to the test. What is the significance of this trip to Jerusalem? What are the lessons to be drawn from his interaction with the Pharisees, disciples and the colt owner?

Our partners said: I've understood it for what it is - the gospel. That the Lord whom we worship is Almighty Lord who could suffer with dignity. Even though he knew he was going to shed his blood, he made the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and we are to follow his methodology if we are to take the cross.

There was generosity (the owner of the colt), the welcoming of leaders of goodwill into their home towns, and the importance of social celebrations.

What lessons do you think you can draw from the way Jesus interacted with the Pharisees, his disciples and the colt owner?

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Going Deeper Into The Passage
God's chosen people were always seeking signs that they were still that people and that God would

save them. There were images of military conquest and of a messiah who might save the people from God's judgment. Often the two become fused and confused, and the image of the messiah became that of a military king.

There was some expectation among the people that Jesus might be that person. For those who shared the road to Jerusalem with Jesus on the first Palm Sunday, what happened would have unleashed images of Simon Maccabaeus, the great guerilla leader who liberated Palestine from Hellenist rule two centuries earlier. He entered Jerusalem 'with praise and palm branches. . . and with hymns and songs' (1 Macc 13:51). Was Jesus also going to do this? Was Jesus another Simon? Would he throw out the Romans?

Jesus clearly knew what was being whispered among the people, for he made no attempt – even in those very dangerous times – to slip quietly into the city. He wanted the people to know and understand something about him: he was not a warrior king

but the Messiah who will be the prince of peace. Each of Jesus' actions was intended to subvert the popular expectation. He deliberately organised the symbolism of this moment around an image from Zechariah:

Shout aloud, daughters of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding upon... a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem...and shall command peace to the nations.
Zechariah 9:9f

Jesus engaged in a piece of street theatre. His entry was not simply a spontaneous moment, but a well-planned action. It was a public liturgy, a statement about himself and God that set the stage for the last round of questions and confrontations.

As with the later preparations for the Passover, these are the actions of one who needed to plan carefully, and often in secret. He was in the high risk part of what

was proving to be a very dangerous task. There were those who wished to destroy him or to sabotage his plans. So he sent two of his disciples into town with clear instructions: just after they entered the town they would find a colt that had never been ridden – although how they were supposed to know that I have no idea. They were to untie it and bring it to Jesus.

People couldn't simply go around untying donkeys, so there was always the chance that someone would try to stop them or at least ask them what they thought they were doing. Jesus had thought of this, and had arranged a password: 'The Lord needs it.' (Luke 19:31)

You might think password is a little melodramatic. Think about it. These were very dangerous times. If questioned, the disciples were told to say that their master needed it. But what sense would that make? They could be anyone, and who would know who their Lord was? No, this is a password, a way to ensure this event went smoothly and wasn't hijacked.

The idea of street theatre might seem a bit frivolous or overly playful, but such theatre is deadly serious. It is a form of parable, a half-revealed and half-hidden critique of power and controlling social story. This is an event as seriously disruptive of the world as the cleansing of the temple. It challenges us to ask 'why is God found in this place, and doing this thing in the life of Jesus?'

How do you react to the idea that this was street theatre and involved secrets and passwords? How does it change your view of the event?

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The disciples brought the donkey to Jesus, put their cloaks on its back, and he sat on it. As they began to ride into Jerusalem, the crowd of pilgrims who were making the journey for Passover put their coats and leafy branches on the road – a carpet for the king. They shouted 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who

comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven.’ (11:9-10)

The donkey was not the mount of a warrior or king. This was the mount of a non-combatant, a civilian, a merchant, or even a priest. In our day this would be like coming into town in a Mini Moke rather than riding on the front of a tank or armed carrier.

Jesus may have been the prince of peace, but he chose a fairly confrontational way to enter the city. He was clearly making a claim about himself as messiah. He was followed by a motley crowd from out of town and entered a holy city occupied by the most powerful nation on earth.

It was an action which challenged the Pharisees who thought that life was about their interpretation of the rules. It challenged the ‘political party’ known as the Herodians who supported Herod and his family. It challenged those who thought the messiah would restore the power of the Temple

and the rule of kings who sat in the line of David. It challenged all those who wanted to maintain the status quo and protect their economic interests. It challenged the military who didn’t want an uprising or riot to make their job more difficult. Most important for those of us reading this, it challenged the ordinary people and us with the question: who, really, is this man?

Yet each one of them missed the point of the challenge.

The Pharisees were continually confounded by Jesus’ wisdom, and infuriated by the way he did things which made them look foolish in front of the people. The military knew how to deal with riots and wild crowds, but had no strategy to deal with a man who offered no violence and discouraged it in those who followed him, and yet was still – somehow – a threat to public order. Those who wanted to maintain the status quo, and their own power, were threatened by Jesus’ call for a new kingdom of inclusiveness and care for the least, and by his insistence on allegiance to God rather than to them or their wealth.

The people, the ordinary and poor ones, took to the streets to welcome him. They hoped – for an end to occupation, bread for their stomachs, and a better life. But for them the challenge would come as the week unfolded and things didn’t go according to their plan. Then they would shout ‘crucify him’.

The Challenge Of Jesus’ ‘Triumph’

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was a statement of the power of powerlessness, an example of his upside-down kingdom values, the sort of values he outlines in Luke 6, verses 20-22 and in Matthew 5:39. These values are spelt out by Paul in ‘. . . my power is made perfect in weakness’, ‘The weakness of God is stronger than men’ and ‘When I am weak, then I am strong’. Power for Jesus rested in the rejection of earthly symbols of influence and the taking on of the mantles of humility, vulnerability and servanthood, entry points to the strength that comes from God. Paul understood what this meant for him as a servant of Jesus.

What is the challenge of Jesus’ servanthood for the way we should live?

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Our World

What is one thing in this story that (i) challenges the comfortableness of where you are in the world, and (ii) helps you to live?

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The challenge is to stay faithful to Jesus when being a Christian is not just irrelevant to most people, but unpopular; when we are mocked and reviled because of the stands we take and the values we hold.

The challenge is to take our life and our witness beyond the walls of the church and into the community. For example, we have restricted liturgical actions to the church – prayer, the eucharist, scripture – and around lectern and table. In this Palm Sunday event the church is challenged to take our liturgical actions – our prayers and our telling of the story of Jesus – into public places of businesses and military spaces and places of learning where people need to hear words of life.

Think about the focus of Lent Event. What is one area or issue where your church might celebrate a liturgy in public so that your message moves beyond your walls into the community?

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How would you participate in such an event?

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The Challenge Of Jesus

Jesus’ character as revealed in our studies of the scriptures is a world away from that of most people and he opens up a world that has upside down values. In the light of this thought, read the following poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who suffered and died for his faith in World War II:

*Men go to God when they are sorely placed,
Pray him for succour,
for his peace, for bread,
For mercy, for them sinning,
sick or dead
All men do so in faith or unbelief.*

*Men go to God when he is sorely placed,
Find him poor, scorned,
unsheltered, without bread,*

*whelmed under weight of evil,
weak or dead
Christians stand by God
in his hour of grief.*

*God goes to man
when he is sorely placed
Body and spirit feeds he
with his bread
For every man he as a man
hangs dead:
Forgiven life he gives
me through his death.*

How do you respond to this poem? What picture of Jesus does this present to us? What picture of our relationship with him does this offer?

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PROJECT

How does this project challenge your values and priorities, and threaten to turn your world upside down? What does it say to you about the way you should follow Jesus?

Relief and Development Project 6
Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Location - Mwandia, Zambia
Partner Church - United Church of Zambia

The Situation

The standard of living in Mwandia, is below average for Zambia, one of the poorest nations in Africa. HIV/AIDs has devastated the Village of Mwandia in Zambia where the rate of infection stands at 35%. This has resulted in an estimated 1,300 orphans and vulnerable children. These children are then usually left in the care of elderly grandparents who do not have the means to provide for them. Mwandia has been greatly affected by drought in recent years. Rainfall varies considerably from year to year, making it difficult for farmers to plan ahead. This has led to widespread hunger and poverty.

The Project

The Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Centre provides the village's orphans with holistic care through nutritional, educational, social and spiritual support. The drop-in centre provides children with nourishing meals each day. Care includes the provision of multi-vitamins, oral care, monthly health checks, recreation and educational activities, as well as the coverage of costs for school attendance for the children. Children are supplied with clothes twice a year. As well as providing care to the children attending the centre each day, the project oversees 1,400 children from the village, to try and ensure that the needs of all children are being met. The project also works to build HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention through meetings, home visits and drama.

Achievements

The feeding program has been very successful and currently cares for 235 children. A vegetable garden and bakery have been established to support this program. Three child counsellors have been trained

by the project to help children with emotional, psychosocial, social, and behavioural problems associated with the loss of their parents. A sewing centre has been established to teach vocational skills and the first students have graduated from this program. There are over 700 OVC-sponsored children in primary education at Mwandi Basic School and more than 100 at secondary school in Sesheke, as well as over 70 at college.

The Future

The vegetable garden and bakery will be expanded to allow the community to become self-supporting. The work of the counselling centre will expand by training more counsellors to care for children with special needs. Work is underway to improve the village water supply to sustain crops through drought and therefore alleviate the food shortage. A carpentry centre is also planned to train youth with vocational skills to support themselves.



Zambia
ORPHANED CHILDREN