

# A Chorus of Colts, Cloaks, and Craggs

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"A Palm Sunday Painting" by Kai Althoff

## Prayer of Illumination

Eternal God,  
whose Word silences the shouts of the mighty:  
quiet within us every voice but your own.  
Speak to us through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ,  
that by the power of your Holy Spirit  
we may receive grace to show Christ's love  
in lives given to your service.  
Amen.

## Introduction

On April 1, 1996, Taco Bell took out a full-page advertisement in seven of the largest newspapers in the U.S. The headline read:

***"Taco Bell Buys the Liberty Bell."***

The fast-food chain announced that they'd purchased the Liberty Bell to "reduce the country's debt" and renamed it the "Taco Liberty Bell." In a press release for further clarification, Taco Bell helpfully explained that they were taking the idea of adopting highways to new levels. Thousands called in with complaints to the National Historic Park in Philadelphia, the home of the Liberty Bell. By noon, Taco Bell admitted that, yes indeed it was an April Fool's joke.

Taco Bell had accomplished one of the most effective (and funniest) advertising schemes ever. They were able to get out the word about Taco Bell to more than **70 million Americans**—and that was before social media. When you're going public in America today, you've got to utilize social media, go viral on YouTube, write a book, or pull some kind of stunt to capture people's attention. It's how we do things now. It's what you do.

Ancient Hebrew prophets had their own creative ways to get out the word to the public too. Prophecy was a performance art. The prophets performed symbolic acts to communicate important messages to the people. These were object lessons that were attention grabbing, often bizarre, like breaking pots or burying underwear. They were strange but were always loaded with meaning and purposeful.

In our passage this morning, Jesus for the first time was publicizing that he was king. No longer was he concealing that he was the Messiah. He was going public. In the tradition of Hebrew prophets, Jesus is doing a symbolic public act in our passage. It was an enacted parable about his identity as King of the Kingdom he'd been preaching. In fact, the day before his triumphal entry, Jesus told a parable about a nobleman who went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return.

And here was King Jesus, the next day, on Palm Sunday, doing the same thing. Coming in royal power into Jerusalem. It was unmistakable—Jesus was proclaiming himself the Prince of Peace, God's Anointed One, the long promised coming King.

Jesus couldn't make this public announcement out in the sticks of Galilee, his hometown. He needed the bright lights and big city of Jerusalem. But he'd been planning this for a long, long time.

*So let's hear how he did it in our gospel reading from:*

**Scripture: Luke 19:28-40 (NRSVue)**

<sup>28</sup>After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>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.

<sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" <sup>34</sup>They said, "The Lord

needs it.”<sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

<sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>Now 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,

<sup>38</sup>saying,

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

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

<sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

## **SERMON – A Chorus of Colts, Cloaks, and Crag**

It was ten chapters earlier in Luke’s gospel that we hear these words about Jesus,

“As the time approached when he was to be taken up to heaven,  
Jesus set his face like flint to Jerusalem.”

For nearly forty days this Lent we’ve been setting our faces resolutely towards the cross. Similarly, Jesus has been slowly and methodically making his way to Jerusalem: teaching, preaching, and healing on the road. The seventeen-mile winding pilgrim way from Jericho to Jerusalem is a hot and dry and dusty one.

Jerusalem was Jesus’ city of destiny. Opposition faced him every step of the way, for Jerusalem was the city that kills its prophets. Like the Hebrew prophets before him, he was going there too—to die. The steady ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem foreshadowed Christ’s impending ascent to the cross and his ascent to heaven. Jesus’ Jerusalem arrival on Passover was the culmination and climax of his calling and mission. This plan involved a lot of preparation and thought. First, he sent two unnamed disciples out with a task.

“Find a tethered colt no one has yet ridden. Untie and bring it here.” If anyone asks you why you’re taking it, tell them “the Lord needs it.”

His kingly authority was enough to commandeer the colt.

Jesus was also aware of some of the traditions of the kings of Israel over the years. First, they would ride to their coronation on a beast. Second, the people would spread their cloaks on the ground before the king as he rode in. You may have noticed the phrase “an unriden tied colt”

is mentioned five times in our passage—*five times!* There seems to be a reason for this. Luke may very well be alluding to a passage in Genesis 49 that mentions a coming ruler who would tie a colt to a vine. And this “unridden colt” was just like “the never before used” tomb Jesus would be laid in on Good Friday. Both colt and crypt are set apart for the King of kings alone.

The two disciples found everything just as the Lord said. Jesus spoke, and it happened. Jesus is firmly in control of events. The disciples threw cloaks on the unridden donkey as a makeshift saddle. They then hoisted Jesus on the beast, just as he would soon be hoisted onto the cross. Jesus then led the way on his colt and the disciples followed on foot.

There’s even more going on in Jesus’ plan. He’s giving a nod to the Hebrew Prophet Zechariah who prophesies of a coming king:

*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...  
And he shall command peace to the nations...*

But in Luke, Jerusalem isn’t shouting praises. Jerusalem is ominously silent as her king enters. In Luke’s account, there are no palm branches, no hosannas. It’s only the disciples acclaiming Christ. The company of disciples filled in the awkward silence, so, as they reached the Mount of Olives, they began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the works of power they had seen through Christ on his way to Jerusalem.

They burst into song—singing Psalm 118, the pilgrim song of victory and praise to God:

*“Blessed is he that comes as king  
In the name of the Lord.”*

The kingship of Jesus is focused upon here. He’s been preaching about the kingdom of God, but right now the emphasis is upon the King who ushers in the kingdom.

Remember back at Christmas? The angels made this announcement upon the birth of Christ:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”*

The disciples made this announcement as Jesus’ death neared:

*“Peace in heaven,  
And glory in the highest heaven!”*

It was gutsy of Jesus to do this publicly. There was already a price on his head. But he wasn’t flying under the radar or being bashful. There was a mission to accomplish.

All of the Passover pilgrims walked into the city on foot. Jesus alone rode into the city on a noble donkey. He stuck out. Every eye was turned upon Jesus.

Then you heard the record screech! Some of the religious leaders stopped the celebration:

*"Teacher, restrain your disciples' ruckus!"*

The disciples were calling Jesus Lord, but not the religious leaders. They called him Teacher, not Lord. This isn't by accident. "Teacher" is an address used for Jesus by those who weren't his disciples. The title "Teacher" was used when they sought something of Jesus, but were skeptical. It hadn't clicked or they weren't convinced that Jesus was king. They couldn't or just maybe wouldn't see that he was fulfilling God's divine purpose. They refused to acknowledge Christ as Lord or to shout God's praises. They wanted to squelch everyone's praises. The city is silent and the scribes are silent. In their minds, the disciples are sounding like dangerous rabble rousers. Revolutionaries.

The religious elite knew Pilate didn't take kindly to religious demonstrations. If Pilate and his troops got wind of this, he might yet again intermingle the blood of Jewish Galileans with his sacrifices to Rome's gods.

Jesus, put your head down, stay under the radar, don't cause a stir. Silence your disciples. Send them back home.

*"If my disciples are silent," said Jesus, "the stones will sing out praises."*

These are the questions King Jesus has for us this Palm Sunday and Holy Week:

- Will we join in the heavenly chorus of colts, cloaks, and crags?
- Will we choose joy in our lives... or just jeer?
- Will we sing God's praises or stay silent? Or shush other's praises?
- Will we identify with Christ only in glory and victory, but not in suffering and death?
- Do we care more about peace and quiet, than welcoming the coming Prince of Peace—with all the risk that entails?

We read in the next verse, v. 41 of this chapter, Jesus had a very different emotion than his shouting disciples or shushing Pharisees. Instead of shouting or shunning, Jesus shed tears over Jerusalem—just as he shed tears for his dead friend Lazarus. Jesus not only wept, he weeps. Let us not only shout the Savior's praises but let us shed tears with Jesus over our city, Tucson.

Do you cry over your zip code? Do you pray that *God's* praises, not silence or violence, would fill the streets of the Old Pueblo? Do we weep for the world?

Jesus also wept over Jerusalem because he knew they were poised to kill another prophet—Jesus himself who was more than a prophet. But Jesus' journey was not done in Jerusalem. Jesus had another mountain to climb—Calvary. He had a hill to die on—Golgotha.

Jesus came to be lifted up on the cross  
so that we too might be raised to new life.

Come with me this Holy Week, Immanuel. Let's greet King Jesus, opening wide our hearts to him. Bring your cloak and lay it at his feet. Wave your palm branch and bow the knee. The King is coming to establish his kingdom!

When you're done praying, don't stay on your knees. Let us follow our Savior to the Upper Room. Let us join him in the Garden. Let us keep alert and awake.

Let us take up our cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. For where there is crucifixion, resurrection is soon to follow.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *"A Palm Sunday Painting"* by Kai Althoff

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