

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29, Luke 19: 28-47

What makes for peace

By golly, it's been a swell service so far, kiddo!
Man, in spite of the fact that there are some square people out there, I dig it that we can worship together, it's so groovy.
It's wicked how we're so fly when we get together.
Other people might be, like, whatever, but, whoah, dude, we're bodacious!
Bro, our peeps are so sick and our music is sort of awesome, you know?
Let's take a selfie, because, YOLO (you only live once)!

And way I'm too out of touch to use any more current slang, but I used the ones I knew.

How we use language changes in our day to day. Words like the ones I've used just are retro. They emerge as code among groups of people (usually young, usually so that the grownups don't understand what it means. Once your Mom is saying "dude" it's not cool anymore to say dude. It gradually gets incorporated into everyday language or fall into disuse. (Though I think bodacious should make a comeback, don't you?)

The same is true for how we hear certain words in the Bible. As we all know, the scriptures as we know them are translations from other languages. It means that people made choices about how to say certain things in English. When translating, they chose from among the words that made sense to them in their time. I worked for many years as a translator, and it's a tough job. You use words that make sense in your time.

So when we hear in this passage, words like "king" and "lord" or even "master" (mister) or even slave or servant would have been familiar concepts in day-to-day life to the first readers of scripture but may hear them differently.

They had kings, and people that were taken into unpaid work to repay debts and so on. The people in Jesus' day had to think of the Caesar (the Roman political dominant ruler) as Lord – as someone you had to be loyal to, pay taxes to and consider your supreme leader. (All References to any present day leaders are purely coincidental.)

But lords and kings are less familiar to us in our political and social experience. For us the word slave, for example, mostly likely evokes the African peoples that were brutally captured and brought over to America to serve people on plantations and

so on. We don't easily associate the word slave to debt repayment. The words king and lord bring to mind someone on the back of our coins that doesn't seem terribly relevant, or a BBC period television series.

What do we do then, with this idea – that is prominent in the text -- of Jesus as Lord that comes through to us in our scriptures today. How do we understand and embrace this idea in a way that makes sense to us and doesn't feel like something that belongs to a different time? And, once we have our head around that, what kind of lordship is on display in this particular piece of Jesus' story?

Let's look at this word Lord in the Bible. In Hebrew¹ God's name is written out as יהוה (Yod-heh-vav-heh) often transliterate that as YHWH and we pronounce it as Jehovah. In Jewish tradition it was too sacred to be said out loud, so it is replaced either with the word "Hashem" which means "the name," or with Adonai², which means Lords. So that every time you see the word "Lord" in the Hebrew scriptures (aka Old Testament) it was actually יהוה (Yod-heh-vav-heh) the name of God which cannot be said and that gets replaced with Adonai.

Then when those words got translated they were translated to *Kyrios* in Greek – or Kyrie which are more familiar with we often used in prayer.

And Lord in Latin, is *Domino (Dominus)*. Sounds vaguely familiar with the word domination, doesn't it? That's because that is part of what the word means. And it's uncomfortable. People object to the word Domino because they come to associate it with the domination of Christendom of other peoples in the name of God.

So Lord, Adonai in the old testament refers to God. It's interesting because it does connect with Jesus being called Lord in different contexts.

Many people in recent times (myself included) have tried to move away from using the term "Lord" to name God (the first person of the trinity) because of the concepts of masculine gender and domination that come with that word "Lord." I try not to think of God as being gendered. In our context "Lord" does not seem to capture all of how we understand our relationship with the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Yet, some aspects of naming the sovereignty of God, are still very crucial to our faith. We talk about the kingdom of God, the realm of God, an alternate reality a set of values modeled and taught by Jesus and we aspire to this kingdom. It's hard to re-brand it the word "Lord." Language fails us.

¹ The name of [God](#) most often used in the [Hebrew Bible](#) is the [Tetragrammaton](#) (YHWH יהוה). It is frequently [anglicized](#) as [Jehovah](#) and [Yahweh](#) and written in most English editions of the [Bible](#) as "the Lord" owing to the [Jewish tradition](#) increasingly viewing the divine name as [too sacred](#) to be uttered. It was thus replaced vocally in the synagogue ritual by the Hebrew word *Adonai* ("My Lords"), which was translated as *Kyrios* ("Lord") in the [Septuagint](#), the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures.¹¹

² <http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Adonai.html>

Some time ago I preached on Psalm 23 and I tried using different translations for us to read from. They were interesting, but in the end our hearts all went back to, “The Lord is my shepherd.” It is so deeply ingrained in our cultural psyche that no other words will do. That is the same for the words “Jesus is Lord.”

It’s complicated.

And so we enter this story of “palm Sunday” – though if you noticed in the passage we read in Luke, it doesn’t mention palms. No matter, other gospel writers saw palm fronds, so we’ll go with that. And in this story Jesus is acclaimed as King and Lord.

For this part of Jesus’ story, this part of scripture, the idea of lordship and kingship is of utmost importance, so that we can understand Jesus’ prophetic demonstration. In bible times – and increasingly in ours – who you were aligned with politically mattered. It was a matter of life and death, as Jesus found out. The Roman occupiers of ancient Palestine could have a “live and let live” attitude towards the locals, but people’s loyalty to Rome was never to be questioned. Caesar was Lord, nobody else. For some people in our world, living under oppressive regimes, this is still the case.

The Jewish people of the time, for their part expected a King, a king the likes of King David who would rid them of the Romans and restore to them their rightful place. A messiah, a savior to break the hold of Caesar. It was an aspiration with political implications.

When we look at these incidents in the life of Jesus – on his path to crucifixion – it is clear that there are many layers to what is going on. In Luke, as in other gospels, this story is told in such a way as to highlight how Jesus was coming into Jerusalem as the Messiah, the savior. There were prophecies saying that that was the direction the Messiah would come from riding on a colt.

There are many references to prophecies in the Hebrew Bible all over the place. Notice also how the language also echoes from other scenes in Luke’s gospel. Cries of “peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” Those are similar to the words that we hear when Jesus was born. A desire for peace.

This whole parade hinged on everyone’s a desire for peace. *Pax Romana* (peace through force) was being enforced and people wanted a change. But if we look more closely Jesus and his followers seem to be at cross purposes (so to speak).

The disciples seem to think that they are finally riding in to Jerusalem to claim Jesus’ rightful place as lord, as messiah, as king. And they are singing and giving him the equivalent of a royal motorcade – OK, it’s with a colt. People are lined up on the sides to hail the important person coming through and shouting. They are acclaiming Jesus. He will be king and there will be peace in heaven and on earth!

Jesus, for his part, is well aware that other people are trying to kill him, yet he still engages in these highly provocative actions. Riding a colt on a path that was prophesied to be for the messiah, crying over Jerusalem's blindness, turning tables in the temple (more on that in a bit).

The folks trying to kill Jesus think that he is a heretic at worst or that he's ruffling too many feathers at best and is going to get them *all* in trouble with the Romans.

Even the Pharisees (who were presumably among the people following) ask Jesus to tone down his language. Folks are shouting Psalm 118: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." And, as one author put it, the Pharisees are like: "ix-nay on the ing-kay anguage-lay."³ Don't talk about king, you'll provoke the powers that be!

One thing is certain in any case, Jesus is walking straight into danger-zone with a target on his back. He is finally and willingly giving himself over to face the consequences of his life and his preaching. It's so important for us to know this going into holy.

A couple of weeks ago I found myself going to a training for non-violent action. Though it is not something I am naturally drawn to (on the contrary), I think it may be important to have skills and habits when crisis comes and we are called to action. Skills and habits in non-violent protest. The trainers covered the basic practical parts of how to participate in peaceful demonstrations. One of the things we learned is that when you are gearing up to speak truth to power through protest you have to be prepared to be arrested. You have to have a plan of how to remain calm, and you are safest if you have people around you who are in on the plan.

The non-violent actions that our trainers were excited about at this point, had to do with going into bank buildings or protesting for indigenous rights. If you are part of these actions, you go in knowing what cost you are prepared to pay.

That training opened my eyes to another way of looking at what might have been going on for Jesus in this narrative. This time, I'm seeing this triumphal entry through the lens of a provocative peaceful action in the face of the political and religious powers. All the signs are there.

He had planned ahead to have a colt, there was even a code word. So maybe it was all part of his demonstration. This may have been an intentional parody, a mockery of the triumphal entries by the Caesars. They too rode into town with people cheering them on as lords, and waving palm fronds.

³ Working Preacher podcast

Continuing his action, Jesus took his protest to one of the “halls of power.” He went into the temple and disrupted the commerce that was happening there. “Hey, hey, ho, ho, these money changers have to go.” This is a house of prayer.

One thread that is easy to miss in this story are the quotations from other parts of scripture. These quotations come from places where there is condemnation against wealthy who oppress the poor. Wealth was a theme for Jesus, one that years of scriptural interpretation and spiritualizing things have dulled for our ears. But we must pick this theme and pay attention.

For example, when Jesus said to the Pharisees “even the stones will cry out” it sounds rather poetic and joyful. But it is actually a quote from Habakkuk 2:11. In that passage the rich and the privileged have built houses high on hills that look down on the poor with arrogance. The prophet in Habakkuk talks about how the stones in walls of the city built on corruption will cry out for justice.

Think about the walls in our time and what they may want to cry out about injustice and corruption and you’ll see a new depth in what Jesus is saying. Jesus is not being poetic, -- well he is being poetic but in the most powerful way: he is calling on them (and on us) to renew our faith in the sure triumph of God.⁴

And on his way into the city, Jesus shows his hand when he laments over Jerusalem, this city which represented the meeting of heaven and earth. I cannot tell you enough times (I know I preached on this very recently) how much this lament captures my heart. It speaks to the broken heartedness of God over their and our blindness to peace. Jesus says: “If only you had recognized what makes for peace... But you did not recognize the day of your visitation from God.”

Here too, the gospel writer puts in another reference to stones – a very gruesome reference. The same kind of stones, the building blocks of systems of power, will not be left unturned. He is not pronouncing doom, he is predicting it.

In our times, politically, ecologically, socially, it is becoming increasingly important what values we are aligned with (not what party we vote for) and what and who guides us in living our lives on this planet. It is my sense that we, as a church and as citizens of the world, will be called on more and more to be clear and active about our positions on wealth and poverty and inclusion of the marginalized. The immigrants, the homeless, the needy, the powerless are growing in numbers and calling out to us as followers of Jesus like stones.

When we want to speak of peace, *Pax Christi* (not the choir) the peace of Christ, we do it under the rule of *this* Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, Adonai in human form. And this is why I think we can claim the term “Lord” when we speak of Jesus. It reminds us that the church is called to live in a different

⁴ Feasting on the Word, year C volume 2 pg 155-156

power system than the world around us, a different realm, the realm of God, the kingdom of God, the kindom of God.

This Lord, as the disciples found out, did not come to dominate, but rather to denounce the powers of Empire, to empty himself, to overcome the powers of death and to call us to lives of compassion and service and trust in God. This Lord is different than the ruling powers and can even cry over humanity's blindness.

Can we hear Jesus' protest? Can feel his tears and open our eyes to these things that make for peace? Can we place ourselves under his leadership, his lordship, and work and hope for a world that reflects the realm of God?

The Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you... (and also with you).