

## **Triumphal Entry**

Luke 19:28-48

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Last Sunday Hilary Putnam died. Putnam was one of America's most prominent philosophers. I say that with a little humor because in America these days no philosopher is prominent. Most Americans, even educated and well-read Americans, probably have read nothing by the leading living philosophers. My academic discipline has gone out of fashion. I do surprise the students in my intro to philosophy courses when I tell them that a century ago philosophy lectures were popular forms of entertainment in America.

Hilary Putnam was a Pragmatist, at least for part of his life. Putnam, you see, was famous for changing his mind. For example in the 1960's he developed a very influential theory of the mind. But in the 1980's he decided that the theory was wrong and wrote the refutation of his own ideas.

When he died last week Martha Nussbaum, herself one of the best American philosophers currently living, wrote a reflection on Putnam that drew attention precisely to this characteristic—his willingness to change his mind.

Nussbaum wrote:

The glory of Putnam's way of philosophizing was its total vulnerability. Because he really did follow the argument wherever it led, he often changed his views, and being led to change was to him not distressing but profoundly delightful, evidence that he was humble enough to be worthy of his own rationality.

“Humble enough to be worthy of his own rationality.” What a great phrase.

Nussbaum concluded her reflection with this charge, “A life in reason . . . is difficult. All of us . . . find it easier to follow dogma than to think.”

Luke’s story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is much quieter than the versions of the story told in the other Gospels. In Luke there are no palm branches, no children singing “Hosanna.” Luke says that the disciples were the ones praising Jesus, not the larger crowd of Passover pilgrims. And what the disciples say is that Jesus is a ruler offering peace, which echoes the song the angels sang on the night the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill, to all.”

Luke’s triumphal entry, then, is far less triumphant. Humbly riding on a colt, Jesus moves toward Jerusalem offering peace.

And then he weeps. One doesn’t usually weep when one is triumphant. What’s going on here?

Jesus weeps because he knows that Jerusalem will reject the peace that he is offering.

This Lent our theme has been Graceful Hospitality. We have examined the saving grace of God through the lens of hospitality. God is the host offering us grace and welcoming us back home. Which has prompted the question “How will we receive the hospitality of God?”

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the disciples respond with praise and adoration. Some of the religious leaders are cynical and negative. And Jesus foresees that the city will not receive what he has come to offer, but instead will reject him and his vision, leading to his own death.

So, Jesus then laments over the city. I want to focus in on this idea of lament and the role in plays, for lamentation and grief are themselves part of the saving work of Jesus.

Walter Brueggemann, the great Bible scholar and UCC member, wrote a very influential book on the Prophets entitled *The Prophetic Imagination*. According to Brueggemann, in the Hebrew Bible a conflict exists between two forms of consciousness—the royal and the prophetic. The royal consciousness is the perspective of the powerful who try to maintain the status quo because the

status quo gives them power. The royal consciousness doesn't want people to imagine alternatives. Rather, the royal consciousness wants people to celebrate what is.

Brueggemann points out that the royal consciousness is afraid of grief and lamentation because they expose what's wrong with the way the world currently operates. Therefore the royal consciousness constantly tries to distract people with celebration.

Prophets, however, evoke grief. Prophets want people to reflect upon their suffering, because lamentation is a form of criticism. Lamentation is the beginning of imagining alternatives. Alternatives that can amaze us.

So, Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem is a prophetic act of criticism evoking a new consciousness in the people and inspiring them to imagine new possibilities. A criticism that Jesus then enacts by his cleansing of the temple.

One startling feature of our current election is how dogmatic people are. The left is experiencing another round of ideological purity while some on the right are tenaciously holding to their ideas even when those ideas are sometimes contrary to the facts. The center isn't holding and very few people seem interested in problem-solving or even listening to those who disagree with them.

Democracy isn't merely a form of government, as Hilary Putnam, drawing on John Dewey, pointed out. Democracy is a way of life, a method of problem-solving. And essential to democracy is the effort to understand differing perspectives. Putnam wrote that democracy is the only solution to the problem of living together in a pluralistic society.

To imagine alternatives, to be open to other ideas, working to understand people who disagree with you, being willing to change your mind are all acts of hospitality. We need less triumphalism and more hospitality.

This Holy Week, as we are confronted with the many ways that the world has and continues to reject the peace of God, let us at least be one congregation of people who chose to receive that hospitality so that we might become better people and our world might be saved.