

Wednesday in Trinity 17 Week, Year C

Luke 19.28-48

This is the climax.

This is the moment when Jesus enters Jerusalem.

This is the moment when the living God, embodied as a human being in his son, enters the city gates.

It has been a long journey: Kilometre after kilometre, the road winds up through the sandy hills from Jericho, the lowest point on the face of the earth, through the Judean desert, climbing all the way. It's hot, and since it seldom rains, it's almost always dusty. Yet this was the way the pilgrims came. This is the way that Jesus planned to come all along. This is the climax of his story, of his public career, of his vocation. He knew well enough what he was going to face and he met it head on. If he was to continue to announce the Kingdom of God, that announcement could only come true if he embodied all the things that he'd been talking about. The living God was at work to heal and save and the forces of evil and death were massed to oppose him, like the armies of Egypt with Pharaoh at their head, trying to prevent the Israelites from leaving. But now, in this final week, God's great new exodus, God's great new Passover was going to happen and nothing – nothing – was going to stop his son, Jesus, from celebrating it. This is the pilgrimage of pilgrimages. This is new Passover in the city of God.

It is also a royal occasion. Fulfilling the prophet Zechariah (Zech 9.9), Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of a young foal, almost certainly a donkey's colt. Like the tomb that he will lie in a week later, it had never been used before. The disciples immediately pick up on what's happening and spread their cloaks on the road before him in a kind of instant royal-celebration.

The crowd sings the great song of victory, the hymn of praise to God who defeats all his foes and establishes his kingdom – Psalm 118. Jesus is the fulfilment of the nation's hopes, answering the deep longing for a king who would bring peace to earth from heaven itself.

The Pharisees, anxious about this messianic celebration, grumble off to the side, but Jesus knows that the Psalm is entirely appropriate: God's great Exodus is coming.

And yet, as Jesus nears Jerusalem, sets his eyes on the city, he weeps. This isn't a moment of regrettable weakness. He had already warned of the judgment to come (Luke 19.11-27). This isn't a moment of gloating – 'I told you so'. He weeps like the great prophet Jeremiah. The terrible judgment that has been pronounced is done not from stern and cold justice, but from a heart of love that wants the best for, and from, the people, and so must now oppose, with sorrow and tears the rebellion that had set its own interests and agendas before those of God.

That's why the scene in the Temple happens straight on the back of this triumphal entry. His action is a solemn prophetic warning: if the Temple has been taken over by brigands – literal or metaphorical – then it too will come under God's judgment. Not unsurprisingly, a popular act with the ruling elite. It is this action that provides the immediate cause for his arrest. The storm clouds are gathering. There is inevitability about what's going to happen to Jesus; but there is no other way for this to happen. God's plan of salvation must be accomplished.

Jesus is embodying God's long-awaited return to Zion. The tears that Jesus cries are not just a human reaction to a sad and frustrating situation. They are the tears of the God of love.