

# The Time of God's Coming

Luke 19:29–44

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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Throughout the season of Lent, we have been making our way through portions of Luke's gospel, paying attention to some of the ways in which Jesus collides with our expectations, assumptions, and preferences.

We've seen in Jesus a beautifully compelling and hopeful figure, but also someone who unsettles and provokes.

To use the perhaps overused cliché, he comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

Today, on Palm Sunday, Christ collides with human expectations in a very obvious way.

The loud cheers of blessing that greeted Jesus as he approached Jerusalem point to a very specific set of expectations.

The people wanted a mighty king to rule from Jerusalem. They wanted the Romans out. They wanted punishment for their enemies. They wanted the fulfillment of all they had hoped for since they had been exiled centuries earlier.

What they would get is donkey instead of a warhorse, and an execution instead of a coronation.

Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, and Holy Week is in many ways *the* collision between Christ and the world.

It is where human expectations shatter, where our understanding of who God is and how God works is violently upended.

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Most Palm Sundays, I have tended to focus on the theme of human expectations and how Holy Week blows these apart.

This year, I found myself returning to the other side of the equation: What did *Jesus* expect as he trudged along on that little donkey outside Jerusalem?

Well, Jesus knew that he was going to die. This much seems obvious if we have been paying attention to the gospel accounts of his three-year ministry.

In Luke, Jesus predicts his death six times before he arrives at the gates of Jerusalem (Luke 9:22, 9:45-45, 12:50, 13:33, 17:24-25). Some of these predictions are more explicit than others, but they all point in their own way to the undeniable truth that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to die.

We heard by far the most detailed and undeniable of these references last week.

**Luke 18:31-34:** Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”

So, Jesus is expecting to suffer, and he is expecting to die. This much is clear.

But Jesus is not marching off to die in a kind of “business-as-usual” kind of way, as if he just has one more thing to check off his list as the Incarnate Son of God.

He is not a robot; he is a human being.

The oldest creeds of the Christian faith have always stubbornly insisted that Jesus is *fully* God and *fully* human.

Not some kind of half and half God-man hybrid. Not 50% of each. Jesus isn’t God in a human body who only *seems* to be experiencing the fears and the tears of human life.

No, fully God, fully human.

Even before the creeds took shape, the early church insisted upon it.

Colossians 2:9: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”

Hebrews 1:3: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word”

We struggle to understand this, to conceptualize it.

If we think of Jesus only as fully God, he must only *appear* to be human—all the language portraying him suffering and doubting and wishing there was another way (Gethsemane) must largely be for our benefit, to give the appearance of humanity.

If we think of Jesus only as fully human, he’s largely a victim of injustice, as powerless to affect the forces that act upon him as you and I would be.

The divinity and humanity of Jesus is one of the deep mysteries of the Christian faith. But it is one that we, too, must stubbornly cling to.

It is less a doctrine to be explained than a mystery to be proclaimed.

From birth to death, Jesus takes on the *fullness* of human experience.

So, as he marches into Jerusalem on a colt, Jesus does so not as the risen and exalted Lord of Creation but as a thirty-three-year-old rabbi at the end of a harrowing three-year ministry, with dark clouds looming on the horizon

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What does Jesus expect?

Psalm 31 is often read on Palm Sunday, and I think it’s because it could well narrate what’s going on inside Jesus.

Jesus routinely gives expression to what he is feeling via the Psalms, particularly during his darkest hour.

On the cross, he quotes Psalm 22:1: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus’ last recorded words come from Psalm 31:5: “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The Psalms are where Jesus turns to give voice to his pain.

And so, it seems reasonable to assume that the words of a Psalm might express some of what Jesus was experiencing beneath the surface at the outskirts of Jerusalem, and what he would certainly experience five days later.

I want to read Psalm 31. As you listen, think about Jesus on his little donkey, the weight of the world on his shoulders, bracing himself to do what he knows he must.

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.

<sup>10</sup> My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my affliction,  
and my bones grow weak.

<sup>11</sup> Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors  
and an object of dread to my closest friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from me.

<sup>12</sup> I am forgotten as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.

<sup>13</sup> For I hear many whispering,  
“Terror on every side!”  
They conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.

Can we imagine Jesus entering Jerusalem frightened, uncertain, in anguish and sorrow?

Can we imagine him thinking, “I’m not sure I can do this?” Can we resist the temptation to jump ahead to the victory of Easter Sunday and contemplate the human Jesus outside Jerusalem?

Is there room in our theology for a God who enters into the deepest and darkest places of human sorrow, fear, and apprehension?

There should be.

I think that this is one of Christianity's great gifts to the world. There is no other religion that makes the audacious claim that God suffers alongside his own creation.

There is no other religion that portrays a God so vulnerable.

There is no other religion that scandalously insists on a God who allows himself to be the victim of the sin and violence of his own creatures in an incredible display of love and self-sacrifice.

Many people shrink away from this claim. As I said, it's easier to think of divine Jesus undergoing all the awful events of Holy Week as a kind of performance for our benefit.

Yes, he suffered, but you know, he was *God*. It's not the same as if it was you or me! All of this is just the prelude to resurrection.

But I think we must sit with passages like Psalm 31. We must sit with Jesus weeping outside Jerusalem because his people refuse the things that make for peace.

Because there is good news even here, even before we get to Easter Sunday

**The good news is that as Christians we worship a God who knows what it's like to be human.**

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be deeply and persistently misunderstood.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be betrayed by people that you love, people you had poured the best part of yourself into, people you expected better from, people from whom you had hoped for more.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be afraid, to have that sinking feeling of dread in your stomach, to have your mouth go dry and your strength fail.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to feel helpless and angry at the inevitability of human lust for power and the impulse to find someone to blame.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to feel like the bad guys always win.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to feel used—to be loved and adored only when you're giving people what they want, when you're meeting their needs, when you're putting on a show.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be abandoned and to feel utterly alone.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be mocked, ridiculed, dismissed.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to be seen as a failure.

Because of Jesus, God knows what it's like to suffer and to die.

These are some of the hardest things we experience as human beings. And because of Jesus, God not only knows what they feel like, but enters right into them with us.

God knows what it's like to be human from the inside. Because of Jesus.

Earlier I mentioned that the earliest creeds insist upon Jesus' divinity and his humanity. This is to their great credit.

Less so is the attention they pay to Jesus' life, to the actual ways in which that humanity took shape.

The Apostle's Creed, for example (#923 in *Voices Together*, if you're curious), jumps straight from "born of the Virgin Mary" to "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

He was born... and then he suffered. This leaves a bit out, doesn't it? Like, most of what I've just been talking about.

This week Zachary and I were discussing some of these matters in our baptism class, and we came across something called "The Anabaptist Comma." Apparently, it was developed by David Augsburg (Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Fuller Theological Seminary) and Peace Mennonite Fellowship.

I want to read the apostles creed with the "Anabaptist Comma." This seems like a good and appropriate thing to do in our 500<sup>th</sup> birthday year. You're welcome to follow along in VT 923 if you're curious to see where the "comma" goes.

## ***The Apostles Creed with the Anabaptist Comma<sup>1</sup>***

**I believe in God,  
The Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ,  
God's only Son,  
our Lord, who was  
Conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,**

### ***Comma..***

*[Welcomed by shepherds,  
Greeted by Magi,  
Pursued by Herod,  
Sheltered in Egypt,  
Taught by Joseph,  
Baptized by John,  
Tempted by Satan,  
Followed by disciples,  
Heard by multitudes,  
Understood by simple,  
Despised by clergy,  
Praised by lepers,  
Hosted by outcasts,  
Seen by the blind,  
Touched by the ill,  
Obeyed by psychotics,  
Rejected by siblings,  
Rebuked by Martha,  
Embraced by Mary,  
Anointed by a prostitute,  
Cheered by crowds,  
Loved by John,  
Hated by the Powers,*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://matthewrpeterson.substack.com/p/on-the-anabaptist-comma-to-the-apostles-creed>

*Abandoned by all,  
Grieved in Gethsemane  
Betrayed by disciples,  
Denied by Peter,  
Arrested by Herod,*

**Comma...**

**Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried;  
On the third day he rose again;  
He ascended into heaven,  
He is seated on the right hand of the Father,  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy catholic church,  
The communion of saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting.**

I like the Creed with the Anabaptist comma, even if I think it makes it a bit long for public recitation. 😊

It communicates something very important. That Jesus' life matters. The things that he taught, the miracles he performed, the ways he interacted with people, all his collisions with the world, large and small—all of it represented “the time of God's coming.”

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Back to Jesus and his expectations. Psalm 31 doesn't end with sorrow and sadness, but with a determined expression of trust:

<sup>14</sup>But I trust in you, Lord;  
I say, “You are my God.”  
<sup>15</sup>My times are in your hands;  
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,  
from those who pursue me.



<sup>16</sup> Let your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your unfailing love.

Jesus hoped for vindication and deliverance. Despite all that he saw coming, he trusted that this would not be the end of his story. He believed that deliverance was coming.

He knew that all the awful things that were coming and all of what he was feeling as he took his first fateful steps into Jerusalem, could be redeemed because of the unfailing love of God.

The title of my sermon is “The Time of God’s Coming.” It comes from the last lines of our Scripture reading, from the mouth of Jesus weeping over the city that would reject him.

He is weeping for many reasons, but surely among them is for the ways in which we so often cling to our expectations and refuse to embrace God’s coming because it doesn’t look the way we think it should.

As we walk into Holy Week, my prayer for each one of us is that we would not repeat this error. That we would recognize the time of God’s coming. Which is now. Which is always.

God is always coming to us and offering the path to life. It’s not always a comfortable path. There are collisions along the way, as we’ve seen throughout Lent.

The way of Jesus is simultaneously a cross to bear *and* a yoke that is easy. It is the call to deny ourselves *and* it is the discovery of our truest, best selves. It is a narrow path, *and* it is a wide mercy.

It is the radical invitation to find our lives by losing them, to receive by giving ourselves away, to spend our lives in love and to discover that the love of God which was in the beginning will also be the final word at the end. The end of our stories, the end of the grand story that we are all a part of.

This is good news. And for this we say, “Thanks be to God.”

Amen.

