

Why does Jesus offer his own body and blood knowing one of his students is about to betray him?

Why is he patient with Peter when he hears his promise to be loyal and true? All of us just heard his betrayal.

Why does Jesus ask his friends to pray in the garden of Gethsemane there at the last when he knows they are going to fall asleep?

Why does he even come to Jerusalem if he knows he will be seized and taken into custody?

Why go there if he knows he is such a threat to those who want everything to stay the same?

Do you see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on this colt? Why does he do this? Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, explains, "There is fulfilled in (*what Jesus is doing*) the mission, the task, and the work of the Son of God: the reconciliation of the world with God. There takes place here **the redemptive judgment of God** on all (*people*.) To fulfill this judgment He (takes) the place of all (*humanity*.) He (takes) their place as sinners. In this passion there is legally re-established the covenant between God and man, broken by man but kept by God. On that one day of the suffering of that One there took place the comprehensive turning in the history of all creation—with all that this involves." (119, Barth) (*italics are mine*)

Why does Jesus come into Jerusalem on this day? Shirley Guthrie, the Reformed theologian writes, "Because God cares for us too much to dismiss our sin and guilt with a casual 'It doesn't matter.' Because words (are) not enough; action (is) necessary **to prove that his love and forgiveness were genuine**. Because he (wants) to stand with us and share the loneliness and alienation we bring on ourselves when we separate ourselves from him and our fellow (human beings.) (253, Guthrie)

Why does he do this? John Leith, Union Seminary's professor of theology for many years, explains, "Jesus Christ is our **example**." "Jesus Christ is our **teacher**." "Jesus Christ redeems us, ransoms us." Dr. Leith uses an illustration we know. "Each spring people die in the James River because they venture out too far into the swirling waters. Some drown; others are rescued. Yet whenever there is a rescue from potential drowning, a price has to be paid to the evil in the situation. The price may be no more than the gasoline for a helicopter, but it may involve the risk of human life on the part of those who venture out to the rocks to deliver persons from potential death. Whenever there is deliverance from serious evil, even in general human experience, a price has to be paid, **a ransom given to the evil in the situation**." (154-155, Leith)

Do you see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on this colt? Why does he do this? In the first servant song of Isaiah 42, we hear, "**See, the former things have come to pass and new things I now declare; before they spring up, I tell you of them**." (Isaiah 42:9 NRSV)

In the second song in Isaiah 49, "**I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth**." (Isaiah 49:6 NRSV)

From our reading today, from the third servant song in Isaiah 50, "**Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up**." (Isaiah 50:8-9 NRSV)

Why does Jesus come to Jerusalem on this day? **He comes as the redemptive judge**. He comes **as proof of the genuine love and forgiveness of God**. He comes **as the example, the teacher and the ransom and the victory over sin and death and the devil** this world needs. He comes as **the suffering servant who does a new thing, who bring light to the world's darkness, who stands against all adversaries, and who makes people like us wonder at and worship him for his amazing courage**.

There is a moment in George Frederic Handel's *Messiah* at the very beginning of the final chorus when everyone stands often in respect...sometimes in worship and praise. On Palm Sunday, we all may stand here to honor this Savior. Let us stand together to worship him as he passes here to reconcile us to Almighty God.

Works Cited

Barth, Karl, Church Dogmatics, A Selection, Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, Publishers, Hagerstown, 1961.

Guthrie, Shirley C, Jr., Christian Doctrine, Teachings of the Christian Church, The Covenant Life Curriculum, CLC Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1968.

Leith, John H., Basic Christian Doctrine, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993.

Reconciling God, we offer our attention here to the Savior who keeps doing his work in our midst. We are grateful for his courage and conviction. Too often we take him for granted. We give you thanks and praise for the holy work we celebrate on this day. Keep us from being like those who lay down cloaks and palm branches and very quickly run away from the challenges of loyalty and discipline and faith. Give us the wisdom of this great story. Enthuse us with an enduring appreciation for what your Son keeps doing on our behalf. Connect us God to yourself in ways that allow us to learn you can be trusted and loved and obeyed. Let us walk with you through this Holy Week in reflection and prayer and learn the lessons and be filled with the Spirit in ways that prepare us for being your good news in this community. Hear us as we pray together: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...