

Pure praise: Luke 19:28-40

by [Jin S. Kim](#) in the [March 23, 2010](#) issue

For a number of years our church has had a pastoral internship program designed for intensive discipleship training and character formation. From time to time, our interns are asked: “Is your church a cult?” We laugh about this, but the concern is understandable, especially given the society we live in. The ancient monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that our interns take make little sense in a country founded on “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Our interns are expected to learn to relinquish their sense of autonomy and control, and to trust the wisdom, guidance and advocacy of a pastor and congregation who dare to say, “Follow us.” Our call is to build up the beloved community together, but that also requires that we do certain concrete tasks. The interns understand the import of assignments to preach, teach or lead. But when I ask them to shovel the snow in the parking lot or do the dishes in the church kitchen, their reaction can border on incredulity. We got our seminary degree for this?

In Luke 19:28, Jesus has just finished teaching the parable of the ten pounds. The slave who hides the one pound instead of investing it and making it grow is condemned by the master for passing judgment on the master’s character: “You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man? I will judge you by your own words!” It’s after Jesus tells this parable that he goes toward Jerusalem.

In contrast to the disobedient slave, two disciples are given simple instructions and, amazingly, do exactly as they’re told. Jesus does not explain what the colt will be used for, why it must be a colt that has not been ridden or tamed, or how they can take a colt without paying for it. Weren’t they tempted to judge Jesus too? If he was not a harsh man, wasn’t he at least a bit strange?

Perhaps three years of discipleship training taught the disciples to have faith like that of a child. “The Lord needs it” was all that they were to say. The disciples were not to judge Jesus’ motives, character or mission. They were not to second-guess Jesus as the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to second-guess God. They were to empty themselves of the locus of internalized authority and adopt Jesus as their

master.

This innocent trusting of God can happen only among those who've entered into what Paul Ricoeur calls a "second naïveté." Shifting the locus of authority from an untrustworthy human authority to our own person seems like a safer move, but it is like jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. The problem is that we realize that we are no more trustworthy than other people, and that our capacity to harm ourselves is often as great as that of others to harm us. Instead of either a childish hermeneutic of blind faith or an adult hermeneutic of suspicion, the move to discipleship requires a hermeneutic of trust, where we suspend judgment and relocate our locus of authority to a fallible other who has demonstrated greater trustworthiness than one's own self.

Then we are in the position to trust a Jesus who will love us as his own children, lead us as slaves and empower us to be investors of God's treasure. As Jesus proceeds triumphantly toward Jerusalem, not just two but "a whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice" and bless him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

But the Pharisees are not disciples, even though they call Jesus "Teacher." Indignantly, they watch the grand scene unfolding and demand, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Perhaps there was a challenge in that address: If you are truly a teacher, then teach this ignorant multitude that thinks you are the messianic king who you really are. You and we know exactly who you are: a carpenter's son from Nazareth (does anything good come from Nazareth?), with a common name, with no formal education, with 12 losers for disciples and with poor masses chasing after "miracles" and free food.

These Pharisees were so accustomed to judging right from wrong, judging what was work or not on the sabbath, judging clean from unclean, judging who was in and who was out, that they eventually judged everyone around them, even Jesus, even themselves. As they themselves were used to doing, they demanded that Jesus judge himself and stop this adulation.

Was Jesus not aware that in a few days these same disciples would abandon him at the cross? But he did not judge the people, judge himself, or judge what in hindsight may appear to be a sham event.

This was the path that God had set for God's beloved, the Chosen. There must be sincere praise, pure joy, deep gladness by the multitude of the disciples. Only then can the betrayal by his people and the agony of the cross be true betrayal and true agony. Only then can we also trust others with a trust that generates community out of fracturedness—not because people are trustworthy, but because Jesus trusts us to feed his lambs after our betrayal. But on this Palm and Passion Sunday there will be praise, such pure praise that if the people were silent, the stones would shout out!