

LAYING OUR GARMENTS BEFORE THE KING

A Sermon by Rev. Coleman S. Glenn

April 13th, 2025

Bryn Athyn Cathedral

“And they brought him to Jesus; and throwing their own garments on the colt, they set Jesus on him. And as He went, they spread their garments in the way.” (Luke 19:35-36)

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, the commemoration of the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem to be proclaimed a king. The name, of course, comes from the palm branches that were waved as the people shouted and welcomed Him. But it interesting to note that only the Gospel of John specifies that the branches were from palm trees – the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark mention only that the people cut down branches from trees and laid them before the Lord. And the account in the Gospel of Luke, which is our focus today, does not mention branches at all – its focus is entirely on the garments that the disciples laid on the donkey and the garments that the crowds spread in the way.

Why garments? It’s helpful here to reflect on some of the historical context. We read in our lesson from 2nd Kings this morning of the anointing of Jehu as king of Israel. When the people wanted to acknowledge their acceptance of his sovereignty, they laid their garments on the steps for him to walk on. Perhaps some of the crowd in Jerusalem had this very passage in mind as they laid their garments before the Lord. Whether they did or not, it was clearly an act signifying humility, a willingness to lay down something belonging to oneself to literally be trampled on by the king’s donkey. In our era of cheap and abundant clothing, we might miss how significance this action was. In those times – as for most times and places of human history – articles of clothing were precious. Most people would not have had more than a few changes of clothes. So to risk one’s cloak or tunic being ruined was to give up something not easily replaced. It was to give up something of oneself.

The laying down of the garments was not the only symbol of kingship that people welcoming the Lord would have recognized. The riding on a donkey or a son of a donkey was a mark “of the highest king or judge.” When David wanted the people to acknowledge his son Solomon as the rightful heir, he had Solomon ride on his mule. And there was of course the prophecy from Zechariah specifically cited in the Gospel accounts: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you; He is just and saving,

afflicted and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the son of a she-donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). And in addition to these symbols of kingship there was the explicit acclamation of Jesus as King, as the disciples shouted out, “Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38).

The people were clearly aware that their actions symbolized the welcoming of a king. What they probably would not have realized was that there was a deeper symbolism, a spiritual correspondence, to everything they did – fitting for the welcome of a king whose rule would not be a literal reign on an earthly throne but an eternal, heavenly reign. It’s these deeper correspondences that show us more fully what it means to welcome the Lord Jesus Christ as King in our own lives.

Before we get to those specific correspondences, though, even from the literal sense we can see that the general key to welcoming the Lord as King is having humility before Him – to put His will above our own, to put His glory above our own. We see this from the very beginning of the story. The Lord commands the disciples to go into a nearby town and loose a colt, adding that if they are questioned, they should simply say, “The Lord has need of him.” It is a startling command, but the disciples have been with the Lord long enough that they simply do what he says, even though it might not have made any sense to them. Sure enough, the colt’s owners do challenge them when they release the colt – but at their answer, “The Lord has need of him,” they too willingly submit, despite the fact that they may well have had no idea at all why the Lord would need him.

This willingness to simply do what the Lord asks, regardless of whether it makes immediate sense, calls to mind what *Arcana Coelestia* refers to as “the affirmative principle.” This principle is the beginning of wisdom. Put simply, the affirmative principle is to “believe that things are true because the Lord has said so in the Word” (AC 2588). This willingness to take the Lord at His word, to believe it, and most importantly to *do* it – these are the prerequisites to welcoming the Lord as King.

Once the disciples had brought the colt to the Lord, they threw their own garments on the colt, and they set Jesus on the colt. We’ve already seen what this might have meant from the disciples’ own perspective – a willingness to acknowledge Jesus as a coming king, perhaps a literal king who would soon sit on a literal throne. But there is more going on here. This picture of the Lord sitting on a colt (and a she-donkey, as mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew), and His

sitting on the disciples garments, symbolizes a reordering of our minds must take place in order for the Lord to be king there. According to *Arcana Coelestia*, “to ride upon a donkey was a sign that the natural was made subordinate; and to ride upon a colt the son of a she-ass was a sign that the rational was made subordinate” (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 2781). We read further in the same passage of the “natural man” and the “rational man,” or the natural and rational planes within ourselves:

All and everything in the church of that period was representative of the Lord, and therefore of the celestial and spiritual things that are in His kingdom - even to the she-donkey and the colt of a she-donkey, by which the natural man as to good and truth was represented. The reason of the representation was that the natural man ought to serve the rational, and this the spiritual, this the celestial, and this the Lord: such is the order of subordination.

For the Lord to sit on these animals was to symbolize the importance of making our rational and natural minds subservient to the Lord.

The clothes that the Lord sat on, and the clothes that were thrown down on the road, represent submitting even the outermost truths in our minds to the Lord. In our lesson from the Heavenly Doctrine this morning, we read, “By the disciples putting their garments on the ass and her colt, was represented that truths in the whole complex were submitted to the Lord as the Highest Judge and King”; and further, “the like was represented by the multitude strewing their garments in the way.” (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 9212). In short, the whole story of the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the internal sense is about properly subordinating everything in our lives to the Lord as King.

What does this mean practically, though? What does it look like to cast our garments before the Lord on the colt, to make the lower things in our mind serve higher things and ultimately to serve the Lord?

To go almost as external and sensual as we possibly can: it is a natural truth that eating the right foods and exercising can give us strong, healthy bodies. On its own, this natural truth can go several directions. We can choose to ignore this natural truth altogether and eat whatever we crave whenever we crave it. On the flip side, we could become obsessed with this truth and make nutrition and fitness almost a religion. Neither one of these approaches is putting this truth in service to the Lord. But when make wise choices on this physical level so that we will better

be able to think clearly and do useful work, then we are allowing this natural truth to serve a higher level of truth. But it does not stop there. We read in *Arcana Coelestia* n. 4459:

One who is in internal things also finds pleasure in [eating and drinking], but his ruling affection is to nourish his body with food pleurably for the sake of its health, to the end that he may have a sound mind in a sound body.... One who is a spiritual person does not rest here, but regards the health of the mind or soul as a means for the acquisition of intelligence and wisdom—not for the sake of reputation, honors, and gain, but for the sake of the life after death. One who is spiritual in a more interior degree regards intelligence and wisdom as a mediate end having for its object that he may serve as a useful member in the Lord’s kingdom; and one who is a celestial person, that he may serve the Lord.

All of those lower truths – in thought and act – serve a higher one, step by step all the way up to serving the Lord. This is a picture of what it means to lay down even our most external garments in service to the Lord.

There is more to it than this, though. To lay our garments down before the Lord, to invite the Lord to ride in as King, is not only to make sure that all our daily activities work toward the goal of serving Him. It also means humbly acknowledging that all wisdom comes from Him and does not belong to us. This is not always easy. Think about the way you might feel about a favorite article of clothing. Even if you don’t get particularly attached to clothes, the clothes we wear often tend to feel like a part of us. In the same way, we can get attached to the ideas we carry around in our heads, the basic assumptions and thought patterns that we return to most often. These very much feel like they are *ours*. And yet, the teachings for the New Church are very clear: we can take no credit for anything in our minds. It all comes to us from the outside. The Gospel of Luke does not just say that the disciples laid their garments on the colt – it says they laid their *own* clothes on the colt. It’s a minor distinction, but perhaps it suggests the willingness here to give up a sense of ownership – to let go of the pride in our own intelligence.

If it is hard to acknowledge that the truths with us do not actually belong to us, it is perhaps even harder to acknowledge that some of the ideas we cling to may not even be truths at all. To submit everything in our minds to the Lord means that we have to be prepared for the Lord’s Word to correct us where we have things wrong and to call us to repent when we are living contrary to the His will. To submit the daily patterns of our thoughts and lives to the Lord

is to let Him change our minds, rather than changing Him to suit what is most comfortable for us. For every one of us, there will be parts of our mental fabric – ideas we’ve gotten from our culture or our upbringing or our politics – that don’t stand up to the higher truths in the Lord’s Word. And for all of us, if we look at our lives honestly, there are areas where we live by falsities rather than truths, where we act against the Lord’s commandments. We need the humility to work with the Lord in rejecting those things, in allowing them to remain in the mud when the Lord has ridden over them.

Let’s take a step back. We’ve been looking at what it means to lay down our garments and welcome the Lord as King. It means, first, submitting everything in our minds and our lives to Him – letting our natural lives be in service to our spiritual life. It means acknowledging the Lord as the source of all our wisdom. And it means having the humility to change our ideas and actions in deference to the Lord’s Word. But there’s a crucial final piece that we must not neglect – we must remember who it is we are welcoming as King. This might sound so obvious as to be not worth mentioning – it’s the Lord, of course, as He is revealed in His Word. And this is true. But sometimes we can focus so much on what the Word has to say about how we treat other people that we neglect to reflect on our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

And yet the truth about who the Lord is and what He did on earth is the fundamental truth of the New Church, inseparable from the truth that we must love Him and our neighbor. *Arcana Coelestia* n. 4723 says, “There are two essentials which constitute the church, and hence two principal things of doctrine—one, that the Lord’s Human is Divine; the other, that love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor make the church.” The Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem was, in the spiritual sense, a celebration of the Lord uniting His humanity with His Divinity. *Apocalypse Explained* gives the internal sense of the disciples proclaiming, “Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!” We read:

These things were said by the disciples when the Lord went to Jerusalem, that He might there, by the passion of the cross, which was His last temptation, completely unite His Human to His Divine, and might also entirely subjugate the hells; and as all Divine good and truth would then proceed from Him, they say, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord," which signified acknowledgment, glorification, and thanksgiving that these things were from Him; "peace in heaven and glory in the highest" signifies that the

things meant by "peace" are from the union of the Divine Itself and the Divine Human, and that thence angels and people have them by conjunction with the Lord; for when the hells had been subjugated by the Lord, peace was established in heaven, and then those who were there had Divine truth from the Lord, which is "glory in the highest."

(Apocalypse Explained n. 365)

These teachings may sound abstract, and it is true that even the highest angels do not comprehend the details of the Lord's glorification. But we can understand even generally that the Lord Himself, who shows Himself as a man we can know and love and emulate, underwent awful temptations to enable us to resist the power of hell.

If we are going to welcome the Lord as king, then this must always be at the top: that the Lord we follow, the King we bow down to, is an infinitely loving, infinitely wise Human God. To return to that most mundane example of eating and drinking to nourish our bodies so that we may have sound minds, and desiring sound minds so that we may act wisely and usefully. To put the Lord at the top of these beliefs is not simply to say abstractly that we do so to serve a higher purpose. Rather, if the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of everything truly human, we do these things to allow Him to act in us and through us, to become better and better vessels for His love and wisdom. When we do this, we can say with our whole hearts, "Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!"

Amen.

Lessons: 2 Kings 9:1-6, 11-13; Luke 19:28-40; *Arcana Coelestia* 9212

Arcana Coelestia 9212. The disciples putting their garments on the donkey and her colt meant that truths in the whole complex were submitted to the Lord as the Highest Judge and King. The disciples represented the Church of the Lord in respect to its truths and goods, and their garments represented the truths themselves. The same was meant by the multitude putting their garments in the way, and also branches of trees. The reason why they put them in the way was that by "a way" is meant the truth by which the person of the church is led. The reason why they put down branches of trees, was that trees meant the perceptions and also the knowledges of truth and good, consequently "the branches" mean the truths themselves. This was done also according to a customary rite. For when the highest judges and kings rode in their solemn procession, the princes of the people then put their garments on the donkeys and mules, and the people themselves strewed their garments on the road, or in their place the branches of trees. For the judicial function in heaven is the Divine truth from the Divine good, and the regal one is the Divine truth.