



The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem 1617

Anthony Van Dyck

Art facts:

Artist: Anthony van Dyck

Currently, at Indianapolis Museum of Art

Original size: 59.5" x 90.25" inches

This work is linked to John 12:12-15

About the Artist:

Sir Anthony van Dyck was born March 22, 1599, in Antwerp, Spanish Netherlands (now in Belgium) and died December 9, 1641, in London, England. After Peter Paul Rubens, Dyck was the most prominent Flemish Baroque painter of the 17th century. A prolific painter of European aristocracy portraits, he also executed many works on religious and mythological subjects and was a fine draftsman and etcher.

He was born the seventh of twelve children to a wealthy silk merchant and began to paint at an early age. Van Dyck's first surviving work, *Portrait of a Man*, is dated 1613. At the age of 16, he had already set up his own art studio. By the age of nineteen, he had become the master in the Guild of St. Luke at Antwerp. Soon afterward, he collaborated and trained with the famous Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens. The Belgian patricians and their wives that he generally painted during his early years are rendered in the bust or knee-length; their hands hold gloves, other articles, or fall idly over the back or armrest of a chair. His earliest portraits had neutral backgrounds, but under Rubens's influence, he introduced props such as columns to enrich the setting. With consummate skill, he rendered details of costume and decor. Dyck's portraits, always convincing as likenesses, show the models as calm and dignified. Their expressions are guarded rather than warm.

He studied and worked in Venice and Paris. During 1628-1632 he painted some of his finest religious works. He was a devout Catholic, and his religious pictures are often highly emotional in tone. Van Dyck was famed as a portrait painter in England, creating numerous portraits of Charles I, King of England, and his family. He was also a court artist to Archduchess Isabella, Frederick Henry, Dutch Prince of Orange.

About the Painting

The painting, 'Entry of Christ into Jerusalem,' was executed in oil on canvas by Van Dyck in 1617. The peculiarity here is that everything is brought to the foreground while the background seems irrelevant. This is to involve the viewer directly with the subject. The two raised hands on either side of the painting, the figures seated on the trees, and the masses' expressions – signify that crowds of people are mobbing Jesus. As the Gospels state, they cried, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." In profile, in front of Jesus is a man laying down his cloak, symbolizing reverence and surrender. Behind Jesus are his apostles in an anticipated discussion of the great things that are perhaps in store for them. But our focus is caught by three principal figures placed in a diagonal.

The first figure is Peter, who points towards Jerusalem, his concerned gaze towards Jesus. This is reminiscent of the Gospel where Peter impetuously tries to stop Jesus from His Passion. Jesus's response, as seen by his raised hand, is clear. "Get behind me, Satan!" he says. Jesus in profile sits side saddled on the



colt, which symbolizes poverty and humility. Though hailed as a King, Jesus chooses a donkey and not a white horse. Through this, he emphasizes that “My Kingdom is not of this world.” His firm grip of the bridle signifies that in every circumstance, God is in control.

But Van Dyck is not satisfied with just pictorially describing the moment. He wants to give us the complete story. And he does that through symbols. So while Christ is triumphantly entering Jerusalem, his passion and death lurk around the corner, as quite literally as seen by the bare-shouldered, stooped, crouching muscular figure. His face is towards Jesus.

He sings not “hosanna” but a song of passion. He carries not a palm frond but a branch of poppy or oak. While the poppy symbolizes death, the oak symbolizes endurance. However, a striking detail is the placement of his veined protruding feet by the donkey, signifying that ‘death’ is treading along. Take a closer look, and you will notice that his left foot has six toes. Six symbolizes imperfection or humanity in Christian art. Thus, through human temporal death, Jesus grants eternal life.

Van Dyck’s style is as beautiful as his narrative. The Flemish Baroque enlivens energy in this scene through the brilliant color palette, the muscularity of the figures, emotional intensity, dynamism, and a sense of the viewer’s involvement. He uses techniques like light and shadow effect, fluid brush texture, foreshortening, and lack of clear-cut lines to make it seem rapturous. Everything is in motion; everything seems alive. This then uplifts the human spirit and energizes the believer to engage in a triumph that even death could not conquer.

Your Neighbor's Bowl and the Gospel of Louis CK

Christian Piatt

Writing books is a strange process. When you're in the middle of creating something this big, it tends to consume your every waking moment in some way. I can't watch TV or have a conversation with a neighbor

without my mind searching the content for narrative or thematic threads to weave into the chapter I'm working on. It can be a little bit maddening, at least for those around us, I expect. But I love it.

One unlikely wonderful source for material as of late for me has been the show "Louie," by comedian Louis C.K. To say he's irreverent would be underselling his shock value. He's a little bit like Trey Parker and Matt Stone of Southpark fame in that he levels the playing field of propriety simply by making nothing off limits. Some might not be able to get past his coarse and occasionally nihilistic approach to life, but I consider him to be nothing short of prophetic in his observations about the human condition.

I've been working most recently on a chapter about God's notion of justice as compared with the human idea about justice, and once again, C.K. provided a wealth of material. I'm watching through the seasons on demand with my wife, Amy, and last night, we watched an episode in which Louie is preparing a special meal for his kids. He has an extra slice of mango left over after making smoothies for his two daughters, and so he offers it to his oldest. Not surprising, the younger daughter takes some issue with this apparent injustice. "She got a mango popsicle and I didn't," she whines, although the so-called popsicle really just is a slice of fruit speared with a fork. But the fact that her sister got one and she didn't makes it the most important slice of mango in the world at that moment.

"That's right," he says, and continues cooking. Sometimes she gets things you don't and sometimes, it goes the other way. That's just how life works.

"But daddy," she pleads, "it's not fair!"

"Who said anything about fair?" he asks, a little incredulous. "You were just fine without it until she got it. What's the problem?"

"It's just not fair," she insisted. "If she gets one, I should get one too."

"Look," he says, "turning toward her and leaning down to meet her eyes "the only time you need to worry about what's your neighbor's bowl is if you're checking to make sure they have enough." then he turns back to the stove and the girl, a little stunned, walks away.

Wow.

Time and again, we see examples in the Bible of God's "unfair" justice. The story of the Prodigal Son is unfair to the more faithful son who stays behinds and tends to his father's estate. The vineyard laborers who work for only an hour and get the same wage as those who worked all day seem unfairly compensated when compared with those whose hands are blistered and bleeding from a full day's labor. Adam and Eve didn't get what they had coming. The examples go on and on.

But if Jesus is, in fact, the example to which we look, let's consider for a moment the point at which he is near death on the cross, abandoned by all who claimed to love him, taunted and tortured by figures of authority, and all because he refused to abandon his message of radical, empire-shaking love that stood firm in the face of any force, fear or hate intent on its destruction.

Talk about unfair.

And in the culminating moment, when Jesus would be justified in calling out in despair about this injustice, condemning those who fell so woefully short, he calls on God to offer them mercy and forgiveness: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

How is this possible? How can anyone see past such grief and suffering, still fully resting within the embrace of that radical love about which he preached?

It's not something we'll ever entirely understand, at least not in this life. This is one of those examples I look to and say that I'm glad God is God and I'm not. I can't even look at my neighbor's car/home/job/whatever and not think about myself, let alone keep others at the center of my heart when even they are the ones with hammer and nail in hand.

But it is something toward which we can look, over and again, something toward which we can reorient ourselves when we've lost our way once again, something toward which we can take small, tentative steps, day after day, even if we stumble and fall back occasionally along the way.

It is the summit toward which the arc of history bends. It is "Thy kingdom come." And fortunately for all of us, it's anything but fair.