

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Triumph

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV)

¹ When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Sermon Focus

The Sunday before Easter marks the beginning of Holy week and is known as Palm Sunday. In our sermon for this week, we heard about the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem, with the crowds waving their branches and shouting "Hosanna." Jesus, the rabbi and healer who led a nonviolent movement enters into Jerusalem in the same fashion as a King returning from a violent military victory. In this act he turns the idea of "king" on its head. He then heads to the temple to challenge the systems of his day that enforce the idea that connecting to God is only for some people, and has to be done in a particular way. The systems in place, both religious and economic, as well as the laws and rules that were meant to liberate a people, had become a barrier to the liberation and freedom of God's people.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem one final time, it is in "triumph," but not as the crowds perceive it, or as the world defines it. Jesus reframes the human concept of victory. Victory no longer based in violence, or in wealth, victory no longer defined by systems that place one neighbor above another in the eyes of God. To Jesus, "Victory" means direct access to God.

Discussion Questions

- The temple rules, like the temple walls, were designed to keep people out. Where have you seen this kind of exclusion in the church today? Where have you witnessed Jesus breaking down those rules and those walls?
- Why do you think the priests were so angry? (Let's try to empathize!)
- Jesus disrupted the entire economic system of the temple on the day he entered Jerusalem. In what ways have we seen economic injustice during the pandemic? What would Jesus give us access to if he were here?
- Palm Sunday is referred to as a triumphal entry, it looks like a victory parade. What does victory look like to a Christian? How is it different than how victory is understood by the world?
- How are you witnessing Jesus giving us access to God in our current situation?
- Share your feelings about this quote from this week's sermon: "Jesus said I am, 'I am the way.' He did not say, 'your idea of me is the way, or your belief is the way, or our church is the way.' Jesus is the way. It is embodied, incarnate, it is God with us."

Bible Focus

In this week's sermon we heard at least six references that the Gospel makes to the Old Testament. Our first is in the scene where Jesus enters Jerusalem on the donkey, with folks waving branches, shouting Hosanna! The reference to the donkey comes from Zechariah 9, and the shouts of Hosanna come from Psalm 118.

Jesus then heads to the temple, the center of worship for his people. The function and rules of how the temple worked were considered part of the law of God; they are found in Torah (mostly in Leviticus). However, the temple systems themselves had become at least restrictive if not actually corrupt. People visiting the temple to bring their sacrifice were expected to use the "right" kind of currency and/or have the "right" kind of animal to sacrifice. People were expected to exchange what they were bringing for these "correct" ones. In this process they were often ripped off. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56 saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" and then Jesus adds, "but you are making it a den of robbers."

After flipping tables of the money exchangers, Jesus then heals the blind and the lame, two categories of people that the book of Leviticus clearly states are not to have access to the altar of God in the temple. All of this made the priests of the temple very mad. Yet, it made the children shout for joy. The priests then question Jesus on why the children are shouting and Jesus quotes Psalm 8 back to them in response.

Discussion Questions

- What do you see Jesus doing here?
- What do you think of Pastor Andy's analysis that Jesus is breaking the barriers down between us and God? Have you ever felt like the church created a barrier between you and God?
- Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a well know story to many Christians (but not all). What new insights about Palm Sunday have you gained over your tenure as a follower of the Way?

Prayer

Amazing God, during this Holy week we thank you for your ever-abiding presence in our lives. We thank you for your message of love and justice. We acknowledge that you have torn the walls down between us, and we confess that we sometimes fail to live in a way that witnesses to that truth. Lord, where we place walls and division and work to keep others out, we ask that you come and flip tables. Remind us the next time we hear a noisy child in church, of the joy that we share being together. Teach us gratitude. God heal the least of these among us, and fix the parts of ourselves that indeed are in need of healing. And Lord, as we walk with you toward the cross, remind us, the body of Christ, that in your death there is redemption and resurrection. Amen.

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"your belief is the way, or "your church is the way."
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