

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Sermon Reflection Notes

The Gospels give us four versions of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; and John 12:12-19. Each has a different emphasis; each has specific details that contribute to the greater whole. No one Gospel can tell the full story, and each should be savored for the story it does tell. Each Gospel deserves its own full treatment, so ideally they are read to compare what message each gospel writer seeks to convey. (From Entering the Passion of Jesus, by Amy-Jill Levine, p. 22)

This Palm Sunday reading from Luke has Jesus going into Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. It is a feast to remember when God liberated the Hebrew people. It is a feast of celebration. The language surrounding Passover—the language of liberation from tyrants—was a threat to the Roman Empire. Jesus was going to Jerusalem, like he had his whole life, for a time of worship, of tradition, of family. Pontius Pilate was going to Jerusalem to make sure nobody got any funny ideas. For Jesus, the risk of riding into Jerusalem in a victory parade is very real. Pilate's presence is an announcement to the thousands of Jews gathered for the "Feast of Freedom," or Passover, that Rome is in charge and insurrections will be squashed and the people will be punished.

Pilate's entrance into Jerusalem was about militaristic conquering and power. Riding in from the west, from Caesarea Maritima (the administrative center of Judea), Pilate's group was filled with marks of gaudy imperial power: soldiers on stallions, chariots with gleaming armor, pomp and circumstance.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was about the power of justice, of mercy, of love. Riding in from the west, from Bethany (a humble agrarian outpost), Jesus chose a donkey, a borrowed one at that. His entourage was made up of ragtag fishermen. Jesus wasn't there to intimidate but to redefine power. His entrance was designed as political satire.

People were cheering when Jesus' parade came to town, chanting "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven." Multitudes of people, cheering for the guy on the donkey.

We can imagine that nobody was cheering for Pilate on the other side of town. And this reaction, this cheering for Jesus, is seditious. Pilate was the governor. Harod was the king. Caesar was the Roman overlord. To say otherwise, to cheer someone else as Lord in the streets...well, that was going to get somebody killed. And yet the crowds kept shouting.

Jesus did not say a word even though he was highly political in this moment. He let the crowds and the donkey and the parade do all the talking for him. But while Jesus may have been

making a political statement, he was not being partisan. His critique was not criticism of Pilate, or Harod, or even Rome. His politics imagined a radical new way of doing life together that was rooted in love of God and love of neighbor. He wasn't working within the system. He was working beyond the system.

As we journey into Holy Week, we live into this story of two cities, of two parades, of two kings. And then, when the sun comes up on Easter morning, we will see that war horses, ostentatious governors, and military parades are not the ways of Jesus, nor are they the ways of life. Let us be reminded that real power comes from humility, revolution comes through compassion, salvation comes from death, and life comes from an empty tomb. Let us join together this week to gaze at the cross and remember who we are and whose we are.

## Scripture

*Luke 19:29-38 (NRSVUE)*

<sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" <sup>34</sup>They said, "The Lord needs it." <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying,

"Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!"

## Discussion Questions

1. Why was Jesus in Jerusalem? What is the Passover story from the Old Testament? What happened that is being remembered?
2. Compare and contrast the two parades entering Jerusalem from the east and the west. What was the goal of each and how did they set about achieving it?
3. Pastor Ron said that Jesus' entry in Jerusalem was 'political satire.' What is satire? What is the point of using it?

4. What is the difference between working within the system and working beyond the system? What steps help move us beyond the current systems that surround us?
5. Pastor Ron mentioned several connections, or echoes, heard in the scripture this week. Can we name those connections/echoes to other stories in the Bible? Who do we think might have been in the crowd?
6. We have another 'dusty' story this week where beautiful things are made from dirt and mud and smelly donkeys. What does it mean to "make beautiful things out of the dust?"

## Closing Prayer

This day of dread and betrayal and denial causes a pause in our busyness. Who would have thought that you would take this eighth son of Jesse to become the pivot of hope in our ancient memory?

Who would have thought that you would take the uncredentialed Galilean rabbi to become the pivot of newness in the world?

Who would have thought that you—God of gods and Lord of lords—would fasten on such small, innocuous agents whom the world scorns, to turn creation toward your newness?

As we are dazzled, give us the freedom to resituate our lives in modest, uncredentialed, vulnerable places.

We ask for freedom and courage to move out from our nicely arranged patterns of security into dangerous places of newness where we fear to go.

Cross us by the cross, that we may be Easter marked. Amen.

Prayer of Walter Brueggemann

April 12, 2001

*Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, page 158

*"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"*