

**Sermon: Enter: King Jesus**

**Scripture: Matthew 21**

**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**

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Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is the inaugural moment of Holy Week, of his passion and death and it begins with a bang! This is such a dramatic shift from Jesus' MO to this point. Jesus has been reluctant if not downright resistant to the fame he is receiving in and around Palestine. Do you remember him healing people and telling them not to say anything or escaping from the crowds to go off to a quiet place to be by himself? He wasn't looking for fame at all and if anything just the opposite... until the time came, until the great kairos moment of his life, and then, as he sensed the time was ripe, he finally raised the curtain on the play and began the drama.

Some refer to certain of Jesus' actions as enacted parables. He told parables throughout his ministry that often made his point through story, like with the Good Samaritan or the Lost Sheep or the Prodigal Son, fictionalized accounts that revealed something of the mystery of God and that often subverted the expectations of his listeners because after all he was teaching them something about the mystery of God. But there are other times when Jesus teaches and reveals something not so much by his words but by his actions. There's another place in Israel's history where enacted parables show up and that's with the Prophets of Israel and interestingly enough their enacted parables often took place where? In Jerusalem, the Holy City that is being visited by Jesus on this day.

I'm thinking of the Prophet Ezekiel, for instance, who laid on his side in the middle of the streets of Jerusalem for 390 days to represent how many

years Israel had been sinning against God and to emphasize that his discomfort was nothing compared to what would happen to them as a result. Or Isaiah, who walked through the Jerusalem totally naked for a while to make the point that Israel would be stripped of all they had and taken into captivity by Assyria if they did not change their unjust ways. There was also Jeremiah who walked through Jerusalem with a big wooden oxen yoke around his neck and then had someone come up and hack the yoke off of him as a symbol of God's promise to break the yoke of Babylon eventually after the exile. You see the prophets would not just set up a soap box and preach on the streets, they would perform public acts that were impossible to ignore, that would be the talk of the town, that might even haunt one's dreams. An effective tool for teaching.

So back to Jesus. This ripe time that he finally chooses to become the center of attention is not just any ole time in the busy city of Jerusalem, he chose the single busiest week in the life of the city, which was the week before Passover, known as the Week of Unleavened Bread, when Jews from all over the known world would descend upon the holy city. Jerusalem was normally a city of 50,000 people at that time, but during the Week of Unleavened Bread when pilgrim Jews would come from all over for their annual high holy celebration of Passover, it became a city filled with triple that number, packed with over 150,000 people!

Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem and the masses of busy people in and around the city. And he had his disciples get him a donkey to ride into the city. Now anyone hearing Jesus' words or listening to this story told in that time and place would have noted immediately what Jesus was doing by choosing a donkey to ride on into the city, cause as far as we know he has been

going on foot up til now. But now he wanted to enter Jerusalem on a donkey. And yes, a donkey was a symbol of humility and peace while a horse was a symbol of war, so that's true that this speaks to something of Jesus' purpose and approach. But more importantly, the donkey in Israel's history was an obvious symbol of kingship. There were critical kingly moments in Israel's history that involved donkeys. The great King David, rode a donkey out of Jerusalem when his son Absalom organized a coup against him. And later the wise King Solomon rode a donkey into Jerusalem at his coronation as King.

So you see how explosive this little humble act actually is. And it had exactly the desired effect. There were enough people who had heard of him by then that it drew quite a bit of attention and many people gathered along the road cheering and crying out to Jesus "Hosanna, Hosanna," which remember is not a synonym for hooray but means SAVE US! "Save us, save us, blessed is he who comes in God's name!" And Jesus rides into Jerusalem proclaiming himself as one of Israel's Kings.

As you can imagine there's a wee bit of a problem with him doing this. For Jerusalem already has rulers who are quite happy and self-satisfied in their positions of power. And looming over the city that Jesus rides into is a palace of the actual King of Jerusalem and all the Roman world and that would be King Herod who was King under of course the true King, Emperor Caesar. So this little antic of Jesus' is treasonous for the civil authorities and sacrilegious to the religious authorities. This display anyone could have guessed was going to get him killed.

And there goes King Jesus riding on a donkey through the streets of Jerusalem to the chants of "save us, save us!". It is a dangerous, dangerous act.

And once all eyes are on him in typical prophetic fashion where does he go once inside the walls of Jerusalem? Well, of course he goes to the single most important place in the Holy City, to the temple? For his parable was not complete with his mere dramatic entry into the city, oh no, he had more to say through his actions.

And we know what happens, with all those eyes already on him, he goes to the temple, to the very heart and soul of the Holy City and he rages, he throws over the tables of the money changers and drives the animals out, saying “you have made MY Father’s house a den of robbers!” He, like the prophets before him, minces no words in condemning Israel’s cultic practices at the time for being wrapped up in ceremony and ritual and pomp and neglecting the justice and integrity and righteousness that God had created them to embody as a light to the nations! Instead they were making money off the backs of poor Jewish pilgrims who were required to purchase an animal to sacrifice for their celebration of Passover. He had it and in the days ahead he was going to be turning over more than just tables, he was going to place himself in the place of that very temple turning over, or maybe better to say, fulfilling 3000 years of tradition by becoming himself the Passover lamb, sacrificed for the sake of everyone. The people would still have a long way to go to get that that was what he was doing and some would never get it all. They would just see a sad, abandoned, painfully defeated human man, though he had ridden into the city on a donkey proclaiming to be king to the shouts of “hosanna!” hanging bloodied and naked on a Roman wooden execution device, a cross. That’s what most would see and turn away ashamed for him.

God's path to victory for us came by way of His defeat. God's glory for us by way of His shame. God's hope for us by way of His utter despair. God's love for us by way of gathering all human hate into himself and returning forgiveness. God's life for us by way of his death...

### Welcome and Call to Worship

Good Morning everyone and welcome to our Palm Sunday worship service and the beginning of Holy Week. We hope at least some of you got your Palm leaves and in a few minutes Jake will be leading us in a craft with them so you might want to have them in front of you.

We've been talking a lot these past weeks about our Strategic Plan for the coming 5-years but this is only the beginning and there's a lot to live into. I'm personally excited about what we're proposing and I know there are many others who are as well. There is also some concern present as well about the changes proposed and who would we be if there wasn't some tension and disagreement in setting a directional course for ourselves, we certainly wouldn't be a congregational church that's for sure!

We need to work and to change at times to ensure that we are keeping open and attentive to the refreshing winds of God's spirit and not remaining in stale patterns that are merely comfortable for us and so I as your lead pastor and the Leadership Team are going to keep pressing us in a direction that we believe is important for our whole church in living out its purpose – with the hiring of a new Associate Pastor for Youth and Families, so clearly a need for us right now, with lifting up the Ripley Spirituality and the Arts program, so apparently an effort that is filled with spirit, by fostering of small group formation for our spiritual growth and communal connectedness, highlighting areas of response to justice concerns in our wider society and more.

I'm eager to do this with you and I am hopeful that we understand our plan as something of a roadmap that we are not going to be marching down rigidly but journeying together, attentive and listening to one another and to God's

promptings all along the way. It makes me excited about the coming years and I hope it does for many of you as well. We'll send out a link to our slide deck of the Strategic Plan so that any of you who want to see it for the first time or study it more thoroughly can do that. And feel free to reach out to me or others on the Leadership Team or Ministry Team to discuss, cause as much work as the Leadership Team has already put into, we are just at the beginning. And we being by gathering a search committee together for the Associate Pastor search and we hope you'll keep that effort in your awareness and prayers.

So check your email for our Holy Week happenings, our pre-recorded Maundy Thursday service, our in-person overnight vigil on Thursday and Good Friday capped with a closing service, our 3 parking lot Easter services and an Easter Egg hunt that Jake and the youth are holding for families, a few more slots in each one of those but plenty left in the Easter services.

So beloved community, since the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday until now we have been preparing ourselves in various ways for this moment to enter more fully with the whole Christian church into Holy Week and to walk the road of Jesus' passion and death and his eventual resurrection. It was to accomplish this greatest of mysteries and our salvation that he entered Jerusalem so long ago. Let us go there in spirit with him so that we can know better what has been accomplished in Jesus' blessed name, amen!