

April 5, 2020
Your King Has Come
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Matthew 21:1-11

[Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem]

21 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."

I looked back in my journal this morning to see when I first made note of the pandemic. Interestingly, the first time I wrote about it was on February 26th – Ash Wednesday actually. I wrote, "*This morning I've been reading about a flu epidemic about to become a pandemic. Coronavirus, it's called. China is the origin but it has spread to Korea and Europe. Apparently it's in the US too – 57 cases in California – but it's only from a cruise ship that started in Japan. And apparently kids can't get it – something to be grateful for.*"

I didn't write about it again for nine days. "*Ten Americans have now died from the virus. The government says it's contained; but I wondered, how can it be contained if people don't know if they have it?*"

Two more days went by. Then every day, every entry since then, I wrote updates on the changes the coronavirus has brought to every corner of my life, our lives. Changes like: me standing on my back porch preaching to my cell phone, you listening while you cook

or eat or pet your dog. Everything is weird. We just have to keep remembering that weird isn't bad. Weird is just weird. It might even be good.



Once upon a time we assumed worship had to happen in a sanctuary. And we fussed about whether we should use a screen, whether screens were appropriate to worship. That seems really ridiculous now, doesn't it? And I have to wonder if God cares either way. Is there any difference whatsoever from God's perspective whether or not we worship on my back porch or in a sanctuary? Whether we all worship at exactly the same minute or we don't?

Don't you imagine, friends, as we head into the holiest season of the year, that God is much more interested in **HOW** we sit with the reality of these days? That we adjust the faith inside us to the reality in which we find ourselves, rather than complain about it or be paralyzed by it?

In our text today Jesus has arrived at the place to which he turned his face weeks ago. In reality, Jesus has been heading to Jerusalem since he first toddled across the floor in Bethlehem, since he stepped into the Jordan River for John to baptize him. His advance upon that city is why he did not heal and feed every human being he met on the way, why he didn't correct every nickel-and-dime injustice that crossed his path, and it's why he told his disciples that they would in their time do greater things than even he had done. Because all he ever truly came to do is the thing he's going to do when he crosses through that gate, arrives inside the city wall, and slides off that donkey and walks away toward the fate that saves us all.

Let's pray: *Your kindness to us, O God, is immeasurable. Never more so than in your Passion – your willingness to exert your power over death, so that we may now never be afraid of death in any of its forms. Not loss, not danger, not threat of nature nor humanity may take away the hope and the future we have in you. You are with us. In life and in death. In sickness and in health. This day. Every day. No. Matter. What. Amen.*

Do you recognize [this clip](#)? We talked about it a bit in Thursday Bible Chat. It's the liberation of Paris in August of 1945. And it's one of the prettier bits of liberation video from that time. The people were thrilled to see those American and British soldiers coming. Other parts of the video contain lots of kissing between strangers.

I also watched footage of the Germans entering Paris in 1940. The streets were full then too, as tens of thousands of troops rolled and marched by. But nobody cheered, and there was no kissing. And I show this clip to bring to mind the fact that Jesus didn't just happen to ride a donkey into Jerusalem that day. He did what kings and generals have

done since war was invented. They ride into their conquered cities where the people welcome them with cheers or with fealty.

The difference here being that Jesus takes the ride before he fights the battle. He hasn't defeated Rome and he hasn't liberated anybody, save a cripple here and there. There is a cheering crowd. And there's a cohort of crooked Jewish leaders. But, as we can see in verses 10-11, most folks just wondered what was going on: *When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."*

We have to be careful friends, not to treat Palm Sunday like the opening act for a better band called "Easter." Something amazing and resurrection-like is happening right here. There is a terrible battle to be fought and much suffering to be endured between now and next Sunday. But Jesus is living like he's already won the war. Because, see, once he accomplishes his purpose – the defeat of death and the defeat of the fear of death – the purpose is accomplished for all of time, backward and forward, before and after the day he accomplished it.

And faith for us consists of imitating him as best we can – like the day he rode that borrowed donkey into town. The worst had not yet happened and yet he lived like it was finished. Friends, that feels like such an important word these days. I am bound to believe that the worst of this pandemic has not happened yet. We have harder days to live through. There are battles yet to fight and suffering yet to be endured. Some of those battles are spiritual – namely, the battle against fear, which drives us to be more judicious than generous, to be more critical than kind, to feel more helpless than hopeful.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people who thought they knew who he was called him a prophet from Nazareth. They weren't wrong. But they weren't even close to right. He hardly looked like more than a peasant on a donkey when, in fact, he was the Savior – *the Savior!* – of the universe. Not just for them – those people in that slice of reality 2,000-some years ago – but for everyone who ever was. And for everyone who ever will be. And you. And me. And everyone going through the weirdness of these days now.

I can say it. I write a hundred sermons trying to find the best way to say it. But at the end of all those sermons, it's no less strange a thing to say. The savior of the universe became a man to defeat death itself, so I don't ever have to be afraid of anything. And we don't have to understand it to live like it is true. We only have to trust the God who made it true, the God who made us, who has sustained us so far. And the God who will carry us through, whatever the future holds. Amen? Amen.

Let's pray: *For your never-ending, never-wavering love for us, O God, make us grateful. For the living of these days, make us patient. Make us hopeful and make us generous, we pray. Amen.*