Matthew 21:1-11 The Triumphal Entry

I kinda feel like we are in a time warp. We are in the second week of our series called an 8 Day Revolution. We are looking at the last 8 days of Jesus’ life and spending the weeks before Easter focusing on what Jesus did and how they changed the world. We are remembering that first Passion Week over 2000 years ago and as we are in the season of Lent, we are looking ahead to Easter this year. So, today’s text happened 2000 years ago, but we won’t actually celebrate it with the kids until April 5th. It feels like we are in Back to the Future -- where we are looking at the past and the future and everywhere in between. Today we are looking at Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem -- more commonly known as Palm Sunday. Things are starting to get into motion as Jesus heads towards the cross.

I have always liked Palm Sunday. I love seeing little kids sing “Hosanna!” to Jesus. Invariably, an excited little worshipper will unintentionally whack another kid in the face with a palm branch. It seems like a little party in church. It seems nice and friendly and safe. This tends to be our picture of Palm Sunday.



And yet, this story takes place right in the middle of Jesus’ last week on earth.

We are in a sermon series and church-wide small group study called An 8 Day Revolution. And at first glance, we think that maybe the author got it wrong. How could Palm Sunday be revolutionary? This is just a sweet story, … right? Well, my hope is that after our diving into the text today, we will see how this is so much more than a religious parade or party. Before we start, let’s pray…

Heavenly Father, we come today confessing that we need to learn from you. We need you to change our hearts and our lives. Father, many of us are stuck in our sins and our circumstances. We need you to bring a revolution to our lives. Open our hearts and our minds to You and Your words today. Amen.

Let’s read Matthew 21:1-11 *“As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,* ***2*** *saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.* ***3*** *If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”*

***4*** *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:*

***5*** *“Say to Daughter Zion,*

*‘See, your king comes to you,*

*gentle and riding on a donkey,*

*and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”*

***6*** *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.* ***7*** *They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.* ***8*** *A very large crowd*

*spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.* ***9*** *The crowds that went ahead of him and*

*those that followed shouted,*

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

***10*** *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”*

***11*** *The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

To understand this passage, we are going to focus on the people. So, who is the crowd? Who is Jesus? Today, I have three points where we will compare the two.

**First, the crowd is stirred up, but Jesus is gentle.**

We see in verse 8 that this is a very large crowd. The Israelites were traveling from all over to come worship for Passover. This yearly celebration was a reminder of how God had saved the Jews from slavery in Egypt and delivered them to the Promised Land. Often downtrodden in their history, the Israelites were used to being subservient to other nationalities, whether it was Pharaoh and the Egyptians, Goliath and the Philistines, or Nebuchadnezzer and the Babylonians just to name a few. And at the time of this first Palm Sunday, the Israelites are once again under the rule of a conquering nation. This time, they have to accquiesse to the demands of Caesar and Rome.

When they came to celebrate Passover, they came with a half-hearted

hope that God would finally make good His promise for a Messiah, a strong man to deliver them once and for all so that they could be a powerhouse in their own right. No one had any definitive answers as to when or how God is going to do this. So they wait. And year after year, they follow the traditions and the rules for observing this feast. They are not in control of the timing or the plan for how the Messiah, God’s Chosen Ruler, would come.

When Jesus comes, they are caught unprepared. They do not have a plan.

According to verse 8, the crowd does not get mentioned until Jesus has shown up. Jesus was sitting on a donkey with cloaks on it. Now my guess is that Jesus was not the first person to ever ride on a donkey before. It is not like this is the first time someone rode in an automobile or a plane and a passerby was gobsmacked at seeing the new invention for the first time. People had ridden on donkeys prior to this, but there was something different this time. News of Jesus has spread throughout the country. Maybe some of these people on the road to Jerusalem heard Jesus when he taught and fed the 5,000. People have heard how he has made the blind see and the deaf hear. Stories of Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter rising from the dead must have stirred up questions wondering is this the one that the prophets told us about?

So what do they do? Look at verse 10, “*When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred…”* They don’t know what is about to happen. They don’t have time to form a committee. So they decide to do an impromptu rally cry. They look around and grab what they can. They grab the cloaks off of their back and drape them on the road as a sign that they are willing to serve and follow. They grab palm branches and wave them around.

Now as Americans in 2020, we are picturing this like a giant block party. We are picturing a humble version of confetti cannons and photo booths and selfies with the celebrity. That was not the case here.

John Ortberg in his book, Who is This Man?, writes, “People often think of Palm Sunday as an innocent children’s parade. It is not. Years before Jesus’ birth, Israel’s great temple had been desecrated by foreign powers. Under the Maccabees, Israel won a measure of freedom, which included control of the temple. Palm branches were used for its rededication.

So palms became a symbol of Jewish nationalism. During two major wars against Rome, Israelite rebels illegally minted coins and put palms on them. The palm branch was a political symbol like an elephant or donkey or Uncle Sam in America. Waving a palm branch in front of Rome was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. The crowd was stirred up and this was a declaration of war.” (John Ortberg, Who is This Man?, 102-103)

This is a case of mob mentality at its finest. Prior to Jesus showing up, I am sure that there were some in the crowd who were walking to Jerusalem thinking that this Passover would be the same as any other. Some were going with the intent to worship and pray. Some were probably going to meet up again with Uncle Rueben and Aunt Rachel. Some were probably excited to eat the Passover feast and have a day off of work. Some, were probably tired of the state of things and were looking for an excuse to stir things up. Regardless of their motivations earlier that morning, once the chants began to be yelled and once the palms began waving, IT WAS ON!!!

Suddenly it wasn’t just a peaceful walk, this group was gearing up to fight.

This was a war cry. The crowd is stirred up, ***but not Jesus***.

Jesus is completely calm. Unlike the crowd who has no plan, Jesus is in full command of what is about to happen. He actually predicts what will happen in verses 1-3 to His disciples. Nothing surprises Jesus here. He is not taking off-guard. No, He is calling the shots. And this was not an impromptu decision.

The crowd was stirred up, but verse 5 tells us that Jesus was quiet. “*Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”* The crowd is nosy, waving palm branches, and causing a big ruckus. Jesus is quiet, calm, gentle, and sitting. In fact, Jesus’ gentle demeanor was catching. Think about this. Have you ever tried to lead a donkey anywhere? They are not the most obedient creatures on the planet during the best of times. And here, there is a mother donkey and her colt surrounded by a bunch of loud yahoos that are waving leaves that might be misinterpreted as whips to the mind of these animals. But, the donkey doesn’t buck or sit down refusing to move. The donkey doesn’t bellow in refusal to follow. Mothers are often incredibly protective of their babies in nature. And yet, this mother donkey is content to let Jesus ride her colt. The colt, who probably had never had anyone ride it before, is content to carry Jesus. Despite all the distraction, even though the crowds were stirred up, the donkeys could sense their Creator. They were not afraid, because they saw that Jesus was not afraid. Jesus had a plan. He was in charge. And yet, He didn’t make a lavish, overblown production. He came humbly and gently. The crowd was stirred up, but Jesus was gentle. Jesus was revolutionary, because Jesus did the unexpected.

**Second, the crowd knew Scripture in part, but Jesus knew Scripture fully.**

In our passage for today, Matthew references other passages of Scripture. Whenever a New Testament author quotes Old Testament scripture, they are using it to make a point. Often, it is to point to Jesus as the Son of God and how prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. The fact that Matthew quotes from 3 different sources from the Old Testament shows that this is a pivotal point in our understanding of who Jesus is.

Matthew says in verses 9 and 10, “*The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’”*  The crowds are remembering their Torah lessons. They are recalling passages from the Old Testament that talk about the coming Messiah. *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* points back to God’s promise to King David in 2nd Samuel 7, where God makes a covenantal promise to David that God will always have a descendant of David’s on the throne of Israel. God says in *2 Samuel 7:16 “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’”* In other words, Messiah, the promised deliverer of the Israelites, would come from David’s line.

But, the Jews of Jesus’ day had a very particular idea of what Messiah would look like.

John Ortberg, again, says, “The “triumphal entry” was, for the crowds,

a military statement. Matthew indicates this by the shouts of the crowd.

They begin by quoting Psalm 118: “Hosanna! [Lord, save us]

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” In Psalm 118, the next line is “From the house of the LORD we bless you.”

That is not what the crowds say.

What they say is “Blessed is the king of Israel!” In other words, “Blessed is the one who is going to overthrow Pilate, Herod, and Caesar.” (John Ortberg, Who is This Man?, 102-103)

The crowd knew the Scriptures, but they proof-texted the Scriptures. They bent it to mean what they wanted it to mean. They were tired of waiting on God’s timing and wanted to start the wheels in motion now.

Jesus didn’t have to change the Scriptures to try to get His way. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed. That means that Jesus helped to write the Scripture. He didn’t have to force it to fit His agenda, because He knew from the beginning what was going to happen and how it was all going to work. He knew the timing and all the factors.

Look at Matthew 21 verse 4, “*This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet…”*

Look at verse 5, Matthew is remembering the words from Zechariah 9:9. It says, *“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!*

*Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

God had this planned well in advance, not just in the Old Testament days of Zechariah, which was written about 520 BC, but since before the beginning of time. Before we were born, before the Old Testament, before even Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, God knew everything that was going to happen. God had a redemptive plan for humanity even before He created the world. Jesus was not surprised by the current events. He foreknew those events. Our God is bigger than time or political forces. His wisdom weaved together the perfect plan in the perfect timing to make a way to save us. He perfectly fulfilled Scripture because He is the Very Word of God.

Jesus came for this moment in time and He is ready. Jesus was revolutionary because He was unafraid. He knew His purpose and nothing was going to stop Him.

**Third, the crowd saw Jesus as a prophet, but Jesus was prophet, priest and king.** The crowd had differing viewpoints of who Jesus was. In verse 9, some saw Jesus as the Son of David. Verse 11 tells us, “*The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”* People then were not quite sure what to make of Jesus.

This isn’t the first time people were confused about who Jesus was. After Jesus calmed the storm, we are told in Matthew 8:27, *“The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of*

*man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*  After healing the paralytic, the religious leaders asked in Luke 5:21, *““Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* EvenJohn the Baptist, when in prison, sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus in Matthew 11:3, “*Are You the One Who was to come, or should we look for another?”* Throughout Jesus’ ministry people were trying to understand who He was. He was different than anyone else that they had ever seen before.

It could also have been said to be a way to belittle Jesus. This crowd inside Jerusalem identifies him only as “the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth.” If this “inside” crowd is, indeed, composed primarily of Judeans, they would tend to look down on anyone from Galilee, which they would consider to be the hinterlands—the “sticks”—lacking sophistication—far from the Holy City and the temple. Their identification of Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth could be a comment to put Jesus down and try to puff themselves up.

Yet, when they say, “*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*, they are partly right. He is Jesus. He is a prophet. He is from Nazareth in Galilee. But that is not all He is. Jesus is not just another in the long line of prophets. He was SO MUCH MORE! Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament roles of the Messiah as Prophet, Priest, and King.

In verse 5, Matthew calls Jesus King. “See, your King comes to you.” Jesus did not come with all the pomp and ceremony of a Roman emperor or a Judean puppet king. But, just because Jesus was humble does not take away His sovereign power and right to reign.

The Dutch Reformers wrote about this in the Belgic Confession, one of the theological standards of our faith, in Article 26, which says,

“We believe that we have no access to God

except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor:

Jesus Christ the Righteous.

He therefore was made man,

uniting together the divine and human natures,

so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty.

Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator,

whom the Father has appointed between Himself and us,

ought not terrify us by His greatness,

so that we have to look for another one,

according to our fancy.

For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth

Is there anyone who loves us more than Jesus Christ does?

Although He was “in the form of God,”

He nevertheless “emptied Himself,

taking the form of “a man” and “a servant” for us;

and He made Himself “completely like His brothers.”

Suppose we had to find another intercessor.

Who would love us more than He who gave His life for us, even though “we were His enemies?”

And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power.

Who has as much of these as He who is seated “at the right hand of the Father,” and who has all power “in heaven and on earth?”

And who will be heard more readily than God’s own dearly beloved Son?...”

Jesus was revolutionary. Jesus was so secure in His kingship that He did not need to blast with trumpets and banners. He knew who He was, even if it took others a little while to figure out.

**Lastly, what about you? How do you see Jesus?**

A blog I read this week from Patheos.com said, “It is a sobering reminder about what happens to a group of very religious people when you raise their expectations of a major triumph to the roof at the beginning of a week, and by the end of the week dash those hopes so that even the inner circle of disciples had denied, deserted, or betrayed Jesus by late Thursday, and as for the crowds they had turned ugly. Jesus was handed over to the Roman authorities for execution by crucifixion.

What accounts for this incredible turn of events all in one work week? Whatever it is, we need to realize from the outset—- *Jesus did not come to meet our expectations or those of his fellow early Jews. He came to meet our needs.* He did not come to slay our foes and lift us high. He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for sin. For at root, the real heart of the human dilemma is not our political problems but our sin sickness.” <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2012/04/08/palm-sunday-sermon-great-expectations/>

So, we need to make a decision? Do we see Jesus as a quick fix for our problems, just like a vending machine that will pop out just what we want when we want it? Do we see Jesus as a just a nice, benign religious teacher, but one that really can’t change anything? Or do we see Jesus as our Savior and our Lord?

I pray that you chose to see Jesus for all that He is.

Let’s pray:

Jesus, thank you for coming for us. We were enemies of God. We were dead in our sins. But You chose, out of Your love and mercy not to leave us that way. Thank you for being willing to go to the cross. Thank you for saving us. May all glory, honor, and power be yours! Amen.