

MARCH 21, 2021 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME – LOIS HARDER

- Welcome to each one on this early Palm Sunday, beautiful spring morning. This morning we remember the upside down way that Jesus made his entrance into the great city of Jerusalem – not as a military king on a big, grand horse, but as the poor son of a carpenter, on a small donkey. We'll remember and re-enact the way the people cheered and welcomed Jesus – waving branches and singing his praises.

- First, let's greet one another – those who are here, in person, turn around and greet those sitting near you... and those who are zooming in from home – if you could turn on your cameras so we can see you and you can see one another...

Psalm reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Call to Worship (see bulletin)

Lord God, make your presence known to us as we worship you together. May your Spirit move in our midst, assuring us of your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[Congregation brings palms forward during the first song]

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

God, you have created the universe and all that is in it. You have imagined the solar systems and spoken them into being. And yet, you know the numbers of hairs on our heads. You know our inner-most secrets. You know what motivates us, what scares us and what heals us. Creator God, we put our trust in your love. We praise you and your upside-down ways that will, ultimately, heal the world. We thank you for this Palm Sunday reminder of how Jesus showed us how to be humble, how to lead from the position of a servant, how to love deeply and sacrificially.

Thank you, God, for the springtime – for signs and signals of your mysterious and amazing resurrection plan for all of creation. We thank you for better health and strides toward healing for Gene, for the hope and relief that offers to him and Cindy. We thank you for her dedicated and faithful service to our church as a deacon and we ask you to bless her now as she steps back from that responsibility to care for herself and Gene, together. Thank you, God, for the ways that Steve Banman has responded to the treatments he's had here, in preparation for this trip to Phoenix. We ask you to continue to be with him and Sandy in the coming days. Be with the doctors and all the technicians and medical folks that will work with Steve – give them wisdom and keen understanding of their medical training so that they can put it all towards Steve's health and well-being. Be with Sandy as she waits and supports and takes in the information they receive. We pray, God, for your on-going care for Joyce Bergen as she bravely continues her treatment. Be with her and Dan, with Jenny and Greg as they walk this journey together as a family. Be near to them. Give them courage and wisdom, comfort and healing in all its many forms. We thank you, God, for the healing and recuperation that has happened this

past week for many students and teachers and others involved with the schools that had spring break.

Be with us now, as we continue to worship you, God – hear our prayers, our songs and the longings of our hearts. Accept the offerings also that we give to you, Lord. Give us generosity and joy in our giving as we return to you a portion of what you’ve entrusted us with. May the gifts that are given through your church shine your light and glorify your name. Jesus’ name. Amen. Pastor Caleb – we look forward to your message this morning.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN KING – PASTOR CALEB

Luke 19:28-40

Good morning!

We’ve been in this worship series on Jesus the “Upside-down King” and today we really focus on what that even means.

Next Sunday is the actual Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. Next Sunday, we’ll focus on the story of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Today might feel a little more like a Palm Sunday than last year, but we still are not forgetting that we are in a pandemic. Not all of the children were here for the procession the way that we normally do.

Yet, I wonder if it wasn’t a good thing for adults to experience carrying palm branches up to the front. The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was hardly just a children’s celebration. It was hardly “safe.”

Each of the Gospels has a unique way of telling the story. We’ll spend some time noticing the details you might have missed.

Then, I want to explore what it means to call Jesus an Upside-down King and what that means for us.

ENTERING THE STORY

Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem with his disciples. They are planning to be part of the week-long festival of Passover.

Jesus comes up from Jericho, he approaches the villages of Bethany and Bethphage that are both located on the hill called the Mount of Olives. It’s directly to the east of temple area in Jerusalem.

Jesus asks two of his disciples to go to Bethphage and fetch him a colt. It’s kind of like when he sent the disciples out two by two on a mission.

It’s also kind of laughable that if Jesus is a king, he doesn’t even own the animal he is going to ride. He has to borrow one.

The disciples have to find an unbroken colt. It was really cool to see Brian and Rachael's colt briefly in Eric's children's story.

Jesus prepares the disciples for some questioning from the animal's owners. What we miss in the English version, is that "owner" and "Lord" are the same word in the original.

So it is the "lords/owners" of the colt that ask questions, and the disciples answer that "the Lord or Owner" needs it.

They agree, which suggests to me they must already be sympathetic to the Jesus-movement, happy to contribute to the cause.

Now you might be wondering, "isn't a colt a young *horse*?" Yes, that would be our first assumption, and only Matthew's version and John's version say anything directly about a donkey.

Most scholars think that all of the gospel writers have this passage from Zechariah 9 (v. 9-10) in their head as they tell the story:

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.

¹⁰ *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim*

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River^[b] to the ends of the earth.

There it is, that same word "colt," and it is contrasted with the warhorses of typical kings.

Jesus is clearly sending a message with this kind of animal, and with the way he is entering the city.

Coming in on a colt signified humility. Donkeys are agricultural, not military animals. It's possible this colt had already been used for work on the farm, just not ridden.

Why an unbroken colt? Those of you who have horses would appreciate the danger of riding an unbroken animal.

The fact that it had never been ridden consecrates it for a special purpose. The rider would have to be pretty gentle and patient. The rider would have to be able to win the colt's trust and obedience, much like the wind and the waves that heeded Jesus' voice.

At some point before the city filled with Passover tourists, Roman Governor Pilate surely made a noteworthy entry as well. He likely would have arrived on a warhorse, accompanied by soldiers ready to impose crowd control.

So Jesus makes his way riding on the donkey's colt along an ancient road running to the north of the Mount of Olives, then crossing the Kidron Valley and coming up to the eastern gates of the temple.

Jesus is surrounded by supporters, who go with him into the city as a joyful procession.

Jesus' disciples lay their coats on the back of the donkey as a saddle and helped Jesus mount.

Then they also lay down their coats onto the path as Jesus goes along.

In the Old Testament, laying coats down onto the path in front of someone was what you did for a king.

Yet, in the words of one commentator: *"The cloaks thrown on the road that day were not expensive garments but tattered shawls and dusty, sweat-stained rags. Jesus was the king of the oppressed and suffering."*

They begin to shout cheers for Jesus:

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

The cheers come out of Psalm 118:25-26.

Hosanna is not in Luke, but also comes from the same passage, from the Hebrew word that means, "Save us!" Something you might say to a "king."

Notice that Luke adds the word "king" to the cheer even though it isn't in the psalm.

Again, this was the beginning of the Passover festival. Lots of people are arriving to celebrate liberation from slavery in Egypt.

There was nothing unusual about chanting parts of Psalm 118, as we kind of did this morning.

Psalm 118 is part of a collection of psalms known as the Hallel. They are still recited today by Jews for certain holidays including Passover. The language of Psalm 118 suggests it was written specifically for processing into the temple courts.

So reciting psalm 118 on an occasion like this isn't out of the ordinary, but having a procession around this Jesus and shouting these cheers at him while he rides an unbroken colt... that part *isn't* normal.

There's more that might be in the back of the minds of Jesus' supporters and any bystanders. They might remember Bible stories of Israel's royal processions with cloaks and leafy branches. They might also know history – how people had a festive procession into Jerusalem with

instruments and palm branches after the victories of Judas and Simon Maccabeus, in which they recaptured the desecrated temple.

You can see on the image that Jesus' point of entry into the city is probably directly into the temple arena.

That's a statement!

I can envision the moment when the joyful procession have climbed the western slope of the Kidron Valley and are ready to enter the imposing temple complex.

As he enters, Jesus will weep for the city and predict its demise. Upon entry, Jesus will overturn the tables of the money-changers in the temple, protesting its corruption and its exclusion of non-Jews.

I would guess that people at the time didn't know what this all meant. But their expectation is pretty clear – they wanted a military leader who could lead a revolt against the Romans, so the city could again be free. That's what other Messiahs tried and failed to do.

Messiah a title for the heir of David's throne. Everyone expected the Messiah to usher in God's final reign, and they imagined the Messiah would lead the kind of military victories of King David or Joshua.

In the Old Testament book of 1 Kings, an aged King David transfers his throne to his son Solomon with these instructions to his servants:

"Take your lord's servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule ... [H]ave Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!'" (1 Kings 1:33-34)

I don't know how much connection there is between riding a mule and a donkey. Maybe it was a little bit like a presidential candidate presenting himself as relating to "ordinary people."

Notice also that the priest and the prophet *anoint* Solomon king. Anointing with oil was a cultural practice in ancient Israel that commissioned someone as king.

Messiah or Christ means "anointed." When we call Jesus the Messiah, there is no way around a "king" sort of association. We are saying that Jesus is a type of king.

Some people have trouble with "king" or "lord" language because it is hierarchical. It makes it sound like God operates like powerful humans. The New Testament clearly uses these words, but it uses them in a subversive way. "King" and "lord" are re-defined.

Today we usually compartmentalize our faith to just the private sphere – what you do with your quiet time, and of course going to church.

No president, king, or political leader feels threatened if we sing *"All glory, laud, and honor, to thee redeemer King."*

Nobody sees that as subversive to the social order. No one says, “wait a second, you’re not a good patriot, dividing your loyalty between your country and that Jesus guy!”

Shane Claiborne calls Jesus’ triumphal entry, an “anti-triumphal entrance” a contrast with the victorious conqueror who wins through violence.

Carol Duerksen wonders if this isn’t a kind of street theater, showing that Jesus doesn’t play by the conventional rule-book for kings.

JESUS THE UPSIDE-DOWN KING

Contrast with the king of the parable of the pounds that Jesus tells just prior to his entry.

This is a parable where a greedy and vengeful claimant to the throne enlists the help of his servants to increase his wealth. When he returns, he rewards the servants who have increased his power the most and kills all of his political opponents.

At least in the way the story is told and positioned in Luke, it’s a portrait of a king in direct contrast to Jesus.

Jesus still demands our loyalty. You can’t serve two masters. But Jesus comes in humility and peace. The only blood Jesus’ invasion of Jerusalem will shed is his own.

CONCLUSION

Where do you fit into the story? What would you have done if you had been there?

Would you have waved branches or thrown down your coat? Would you have remained silent or kept some objective distance?

Luke’s is the only the only gospel that specifically mentions the Pharisees protesting, asking Jesus to order his disciples to stop. Jesus’ response is that if they keep silent, then the rocks will shout out.

God is doing a new thing, and there is no stopping it.

Would you have questioned the subversive ruckus that Jesus and his disciples were making, as the Pharisees did?

Would you have stuck with Jesus the whole week, or just been present for the celebratory procession and a safe distance away when Jesus was crucified?

Those are hard questions to answer, and it is difficult to fully place myself there, and not take for granted the “right answers” conditioned by growing up in the church.

The challenge we need is to let our lives be truly turned upside-down by Jesus.

We need to discover a faith both seeks to live at peace with our neighbors but also challenges the accepted social order and way of life of our land.

We’re still going to be human, but the transformation that we find in Jesus, as individuals and as a church, is the kind of love that cuts through all our normal defenses, prejudices, sense of security, and loyalties.

We want presidents, kings, and leaders to fix our problems. We want someone who has power to unilaterally get things done, so long as they do it my way.

Jesus the upside-down king is the king we need. Only an upside-down king can truly set us free.

Like other weeks, I'm going to lead us in a prayer of confession.

First, I will read from the passage in Philippians where the apostle Paul describes Jesus' life as a path of descent – giving up everything in humility in order to love each one of us in our predicament.

The result is that God raises Jesus from the dead, and promises resurrection-life for all of us that embrace this same kind of humility and trust when we are in free-fall, with nothing to hold onto but the power of God revealed in this Jesus story.

During the time of confession, I invite you to consider: what feels upside-down in my life? What do I need to allow God to turn upside-down in my life and the life of our congregation? What kind of resurrection might God be promising?

[Begin reading Phil. 2:5-11]

[Prayer of Confession and Assurance]

BENEDICTION

May God bless you and keep you. May the face of God shine on you, be gracious to you, and give you peace. Amen. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.