

## 04/02/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

(Ann Boese fell yesterday and broke her hip. She's at Newton Medical Center recovering now from surgery. Evie Schmidt died on Friday. Sister to Dennis, mother of Douglin. )

Loving God, on this balmy, blustery Palm Sunday morning we are grateful to gather for worship, fellowship, to sing your praise, to tell the story of Jesus and his unexpected entrance into Jerusalem. We thank you for sending him to this earth, for sending him with the message of your love for this world. We thank you for his life, his teaching, for the challenges that he brought to systems that were broken and for the hope that he brought to those that had been hopeless. O God, we pray for courage and conviction that we might learn from Jesus how to bring this hope, to continue to challenge the brokenness in our world and to share your message of love.

We pray for your presence with us through the Holy Spirit during this Holy Week as we gather on Thursday evening to remember you and your disciples' last supper together before your passion and crucifixion. May that be a meaningful experience that brings spiritual growth and depth. Be present with your people at Bethesda as the pastors offer a worship service on Friday morning. Bless us there with your comfort and the assurance of your presence. We pray for healing and for resurrection hope this week for the residents there and at other nursing homes. We pray especially for Ann this morning as she's recovering from surgery. We ask for your healing touch and for your mercy and peace for her in this recovery process. We pray for the family and friends of Evie Schmidt as we grieve her death and give thanks for her life. Be especially with Dennis and Douglin in the coming days. We ask for your blessing on the youth as they progress through the Faith Exploration classes. We ask for a meaningful time for them and their mentors, for Pastor Caleb and me as we walk the Stations of the Cross on Friday and then have class together on Monday. In the midst of prom and homework and other activities Lord, be present with us this Holy Week. We thank you, God for the mid-week meals and activities that have concluded now. Thank you for the wonderful time of celebration the children had this past week riding the hayrack and having fun at John and Jenny's place and the Jr Hi students at the Banman cabin. Thank you for the commitment and planning done by the coordinators and teachers for the benefit of our children; they give so much of their time and energy! It's a beautiful offering!

O God, we pray for those who are grieving losses – losses of loved ones, losses of hopes or dreams, loss of faith or sense of identity. Help us to remember, God that you are our creator and you know all about us and love us more deeply than we can imagine. We pray for the families and loved ones of the students and adults who were shot to death in the school in Memphis as well as the family of the shooter. Somehow, God may your Spirit bring them comfort and peace. We pray for those grieving losses of loved ones, homes or property in the tornadoes and storms this past week. May they be comforted by the efforts of those who bring help and needed resources.

Be with your people all around the world, Creator God, who are remembering your son Jesus this week – his life and teachings, his passion and crucifixion. May we and your followers everywhere remember that Jesus is our Lord, our Light, the One who shows us the way to you. Amen.

#### OFFERING PRAYER

O God, accept and bless these tithes and those who offer them. May these gifts of money be used in ways that glorify you. May our gifts of our time, our energy, our thoughts and intentions also glorify you, O Creator. Amen.

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Leader: Lord, we are isolated and alone;  
           our failures are visible for all to see.  
           Our days pour out like sand,  
           our years fade and are gone.  
           We are afraid to hope.  
           We confess to the Lord . . .

(silent prayer)

Leader: Lord, we trust in you.  
           Redeem us now, we pray.

**All: To you, Lord, we commit all our hope and all our worship. Amen.**

#### A PECULIAR KING – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Matthew 21:1-11

Here we are at Palm Sunday. All six of our Lent candles are blown out. Next Sunday will be Easter.

Palm Sunday for us is a fun tradition in which children get to wave palm branches in church. The palms are mentioned in the Gospel of John and historically were symbols of the Jews gaining freedom from oppressors.

What was it really like when Jesus entered Jerusalem that day? What was it really about?

Jesus has been coming toward Jerusalem from Jericho. He heals two blind men, and crowds begin to form, following him as he goes up toward Jerusalem.

According to several of the Gospels, Jesus knew the fate that awaited him in Jerusalem, but the disciples don't seem to anticipate it. The mother of two of the disciples even asked that Jesus would grant her sons the privilege of sitting at his right and his left in his kingdom.

Instead, it will be two criminals that will be the “lucky” ones to hang from crosses at the right and left of Jesus.

The Gospels paint a picture of the coming events as a tragically ironic coronation of an anti-king. A king who is the opposite of a normal king. A “king” who is given a crown of thorns rather than a wreath. A “king” who is mocked and spat upon rather than hailed and acclaimed. A “king” who will process with his own cross, instrument of execution.

For a moment, we could forget all that, as Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem with excited crowds.

By some spiritual gift, Jesus knew exactly where to find a she-donkey and her colt (Matthew is unique in telling the story with two animals).

I am a pretty anxious rule-follower who doesn't like to make waves. I really don't know what I would do done if I was an apprentice to some master or teacher and I was told:

“Oh, by the way, go to this parking lot, and in row 2F you'll find a Toyota Corolla unlocked with the keys in the cup holder. Why don't you hop in and bring it to me?” And yes, it would be something like a Corolla, not a Porsche or Mercedes-Benz.

For a brief moment, Jesus' triumphal entry was, well, *triumphant*. What *was* this really?

Was this a kind of accident? Maybe Jesus wanted to get into the city quietly, but here's those crowds again not giving him a break.

Was this a stunt? Political or religious street theater?

Was this some kind of symbolic prophetic action? We have plenty of those in the Old Testament. The prophets could do strange things to get attention.

Why donkeys and not horses? Couldn't Jesus have gotten someone to lend him a horse?

Would everyone in the city have noticed Jesus entering in this way, or would it have escaped the notice of literally thousands of people going up to the city at different entrances and times?

Or maybe overshadowed by another triumphal entry: the governor Pontius Pilate who would have arrived with his entourage of troops?

Was Jesus actually declaring himself to be king? Was this seditious behavior?

How could Jesus go from having this popular support to later being led away to be executed as an angry mob shouted “crucify him!”

It can really be hard to get our heads around how people would have interpreted this. The Gospels give us some clues. We may not answer all the questions, but let's try to understand.

*Let's assume that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing and that his actions spoke even louder than his words.* Not only would that help us understand how we might have reacted if we had been there, but also how we are going to respond to this Jesus now.

ROUTE

First, the route that Jesus took is significant.

Jesus entered from the east, from the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives had a lot of significance for end-times thinking of Jesus' day, because of Old Testament passages where God comes to deliver Jerusalem from its enemies from the Mount of Olives (see Zech 14:1-5).

The Gospels say nothing of the gate through which Jesus entered the city. Tradition has it that he entered through the so-called Golden Gate that took you right into the Court of Gentiles of the Temple complex.

If someone was accompanied by a crowd and lots of fanfare implying that someone was the Messiah and that's the gate you choose to enter, well, that's a big deal.

Matthew tells us the city was in an uproar – the specific word is used for earthquakes – seismic activity. This was emotionally and politically seismic.

#### DONKEY

Secondly, what's the significance of riding a donkey or donkeys? That's pretty non-controversial, right? Jesus didn't come in on a war-horse as Pilate likely did.

A donkey symbolized coming in peace. Matthew refers to a passage from the prophet Zechariah where a future king comes enters on a donkey rather than a warhorse.

This king is humble and does away with warhorses and the bows of archers. But if this is the meaning, then we are talking about a king. That's a statement.

In the final days of King David, while another son was setting himself up as the next king, David told his son Solomon to ride on a mule, in order to be crowned king. The mule might have been a gesture of peace and humility, but it still was connected with becoming king (see 1 Kings 1).

Jesus couldn't have entered Jerusalem this way without encouraging people to think of him as a kind of king and deliverer.

#### ACCLAMATION (HOSANNA)

Add to this the words that people and children were shouting. Hosanna or "Save us" comes from psalm 118. People used words from this Psalm during the high festivals of Jerusalem as pilgrims went into the temple.

These words came to mean a petition for God to deliver the people from their enemies. The crowds gathering around Jesus have the highest of expectations. The Pharisees even asked Jesus (verse 15), "do you hear what these people are saying?" Yes, Jesus did know what they were saying, and he did not stop them.

Jesus was not starting an insurrection – after all, he did not use violence. But it's not hard to see how the authorities would have viewed his actions as a kind of sedition.

Though this was clearly not a *violent* uprising, the authorities surely interpreted Jesus as a threat to the established order – the twin oppression of the Romans and the sycophant Jerusalem elite.

Joining Jesus in this action was less like doing something churchy, like waving palm branches at church, and more like the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, facing police ready to use billy clubs and tear gas.

This was big. Jerusalem was a tinderbox of tension in those days. And it all came crashing down less than a week later, when Jesus hung on a cross.

Was Jesus a failure?

What did people think was going to happen? What did Jesus think was going to happen?

#### CONCLUSION

I continue to ponder these questions and what following Jesus really means.

I believe Jesus knew exactly what he was doing and where he was headed. In a way, this was the “anti-triumphal entry” of an “anti-king,” who had an “anti-coronation” as he was led to the cross.

Shane Claiborne wrote, “Jesus is making a spectacle of violence and power, riding in on the back of a [donkey] (and a borrowed one at that!)”<sup>1</sup>

Often Christians have reinterpreted Jesus to be a spiritual king – nothing to do with the affairs of this world. The Gospel of John records Jesus stating that he is a king, but not of this world (John 18:36). So for some Christians, discipleship becomes a matter of following certain moral rules, doing our devotions, and looking forward to heaven. In other respects, we’ll accommodate the way things work in the world.

Yes, Jesus is our spiritual king, but I believe that we’ve misinterpreted that verse from John. After all, purely spiritual teachers don’t upset the people in power.

I believe we should understand Jesus as an upside-down king, unlike kings of this world – not playing the game of violence, coercive power, wealth-seeking, and winning that the world is based upon.

Yes, living in Jesus’ kingdom is a spiritual matter. We won’t get far if we don’t have deep spiritual practices that anchor us, free us from our own delusions, and give us strength to risk loss.

But following Jesus is still revolutionary in our present world, even though Jesus followers don’t try to overthrow the government.

We are called to a movement of peacemaking, of inclusion of the excluded, of sharing in the age of capitalism. We are called to live an alternative starting from the bottom-up with the people we live with and nearby.

---

<sup>1</sup> Haw, Chris., Claiborne, Shane. Jesus for President. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, p. 122-123

We are called to make Jesus Lord of all of all aspects of life, without any compartmentalization. We are called to die to ourselves, to let go of the game of winning, succeeding, and being better than, in order to be in solidarity with all of God's children whom God loves.

We'd be absolutely crazy if we didn't know how the events of Holy Week end a few days after the crucifixion.

That's the power of the Good News of Jesus.

May God give us wisdom and strength.

BENEDICTION

May God prepare us to contemplate the death of Jesus and all that we must die to.

May God fill us with the hope of new life.

May God give us understanding for how to make Jesus our upside-down king,

And may God give us boldness to turn our own lives upside-down for the sake of the love of God