**April 2, 2023 Matthew 21:1-11**

***Triumphant***

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV

*(1)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."*

**Notes:**

1. Jesus’s triumphal entry is ***different***.
   1. This triumphant King lays down his life in to ***give*** ***life***.
   2. Kingdom of God is won thru ***sacrifice*** and ***resurrection***.
2. Jesus’s triumphal entry mirrors ***Roman*** triumph in some ways.
   1. Jesus is bringing an offering toward the temple, ***himself***.
   2. Jesus rides in on a donkey, a symbol of ***peace***.
   3. Jesus heads to the ***Temple***.
3. We find in Jesus a ***different*** kind of Messiah.
   1. Jesus called out their acts of ***injustice***.
   2. Jesus ***healed*** those considered outsiders and unclean.
   3. Children ***recognized*** him for who he was.
4. Jesus wants to ***disrupt*** our lives too.
   1. Jesus came to usher in a kingdom of everlasting ***justice***.
   2. Jesus came to elevate the lowly, a kingdom of ***equality***.
   3. Jesus came to bring about true and everlasting ***peace***.
   4. Jesus came to usher in a kingdom of ***love***, ***grace***, ***truth***, and ***beauty***.
5. Jesus came to free the oppressed through humble ***sacrifice***.
   1. Jesus brought a ***grace***-***filled*** kingdom of God.
   2. Look for Jesus in the way others extend ***mercy*** and ***grace***.
   3. Look for ways to ***participate*** in the kingdom of God now.

**Script:**

I remember when Shane wrestled, his senior year the team went to states to compete for a state title. I believe they fought hard and worked their way into the finals. However, they did not get the coveted state championship. Instead, they did come home with the 2nd place medal. In the eyes of parents and fans, these boys did not lose; they were victorious, and so as they traveled home on their bus, they were met with an escort of fire trucks with lights flashing. They were welcomed back to the school by a group of fans and followers.

Most of us have seen these types of entrances back home after victories. After the end of WW2 there was a big ticker tape parade in New York. After athletic events the victors are welcomed home with big parades of celebration, teams of the world series champions and the Super Bowl champions.

But these victorious entrances into the cities date much further back into history. The Roman armies would build large archways at the entrance of their cities and when their armies would return home, they would parade the victors through these victory arches. But today we celebrate a different triumphal entry. Jesus is returning to Jerusalem, and all of his followers were with him, or at least it seems that way. Join me in the reading of our gospel passage today found in Matthew 21:1-11; as we hear the story of Jesus’s triumphal entry and the events to follow.

*Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV (1)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."*

Triumphal entries were nothing new to the people gathered in Jerusalem for Passover. They may have even seen military heroes entering the city that week with much fanfare, to serve as extra security during the festival. They would have been familiar with conquering kings and military generals riding in on horses and adorned with the praise of crowds.

But Jesus’s triumphal entry is different. As Gabriel Benjamin points out in *Water for the Way*, “These celebrities from the war fronts are celebrated for their strategy and power to end lives, and they wear their war stripes with pride. Then there is that moment when one comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus is at the gate. This triumphant King does not take lives. Instead, he lays down his life in order to give life. In him is the true triumph over death. He reversed the curse of death, accomplishing what no one else could do” (p. 135).

Jesus once again is illustrating that the kingdom of God doesn’t look like the kingdoms of the earth. The kingdom of God is not won through violence and death but through sacrifice and resurrection. It is not a kingdom of exclusion and ostracism but one of welcome and grace. It is this beautiful and expansive kingdom of God that people are crying out for, even if unknowingly, as they declare, “Hosanna! Save us!”

The Roman triumph was the highest honor granted to emperors and generals in the Roman Empire. It was a processional into the city, led by government officials, followed by the sacrificial animals for the temples of the Roman gods, followed by the champion in a chariot, usually in purple regalia, followed by the spoils of war and the captives of war. This processional was given to those who were victorious in war. The celebrations included festivals, dancing, singing, and flower petals strewn upon the ground. The path for the processional was often cleaned in advance, prepared by the government to usher in the triumphant victor of war.

Jesus’s processional wasn’t into Rome, the capital of the empire, but into Jerusalem, the location of the temple and the religious heart of the Jewish faith. Jesus did not make his entry as the victor of war but as one who marched toward death, illustrating that true victory does not come through violence but through humility. Jesus’s triumphal entry does mirror Roman triumphs in some ways. It takes place at the beginning of a festival, Passover, but Passover is not about war. It is about remembering the way God spared the lives of his people and freed them from oppressive Egyptian rule. The Roman triumphal festivals would include bringing offerings for the Roman gods. Jesus is also bringing an offering toward the temple, but the offering is himself. Instead of a horse and chariot, Jesus rides in on a donkey, which is an illustration of humility because donkeys are common and not a sign of prestige. Donkeys are pack animals, not war animals. They are a symbol of peace.

Jesus heads to the Temple. Although Jesus entering the temple isn’t part of the text we read today, it is an important component of the triumphal entry. We often view Jesus overturning tables as an angry Jesus scolding people who are doing wrong, but the text in Matthew seems to indicate something else.

The sale of sacrificial animals on the temple grounds was both common and acceptable. Many out-of-town visitors would need an animal to sacrifice. So Jesus entering the temple and freeing sacrificial animals is a statement about how *Jesus* has come to be the ultimate sacrifice, not the animals. Jesus came to upend systems of death and injustice. The kingdom of God that Jesus is ushering in is not one of preferential treatment but one that welcomes everyone, where mercy and justice matter more than sacrifice.

We find in Jesus a different kind of Messiah. The Jewish people were busy looking for the Messiah to come in the ways they wanted. They expected a political ruler who would rise up and overthrow the Roman government, in likely violent ways. They expected temporary freedom. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, many of them thought this was the moment he was going to take over. Instead, Jesus’s arrival disrupted the way they were doing things. He called out their acts of injustice: the ways they were abusing and using the poor and denying worship to vulnerable people.

He healed people who were considered outsiders and unclean: he lame, the blind, the poor. Children recognized who he was and what he was doing, and he welcomed them. His rebuke was for the religious leaders who continued to miss the point. We too sometimes look for Christ to come in a particular way. We too sometimes look for Jesus to support a particular agenda. Are our politics aligned with Jesus, or are we trying to align Jesus with our politics? Do we practice exclusion, putting obstacles in the way of people’s worship, in particular vulnerable people? Do we silence voices of those we look down on or disagree with?

Jesus wants to disrupt our lives too. He wants to overturn the places of injustice and clean out the lies and idolatry in order to make space for healing; for being formed into the image of Christ rather than forming Christ into the image we want; and for seeing the kingdom of God already at work in the world and figuring out where and how we can join that work.

Jesus wanted to do so much more than just free the people from an oppressive regime. He wanted to usher in a kingdom of everlasting justice, not temporary justice until the next power took the throne. He wanted to elevate the lowly, and humble the elevated to create a kingdom of equality. He wanted to bring about true and everlasting peace. He wanted to usher in a kingdom of love, grace, truth, and beauty.

Jesus ushered the kingdom of God into the world, it’s still at work, and it’s still coming. Today we can cry out “Hosanna!”, while also repenting of the ways we have fallen short. We can cry out “Hosanna!” and still look for the ways that the kingdom of God is breaking in, and we can join in that work.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he wasn’t seeking to free the oppressed through violence he was seeking to free the oppressed through humble sacrifice. Jesus challenged the exclusionary practices of the temple, declaring a new temple that wasn’t contingent upon location but centered upon him as the Messiah. Jesus brought about the beautifully inclusive, just, merciful, and grace-filled kingdom of God that we get to participate in now.

As we enter Holy Week, look for Jesus in places that disrupt injustice, look for Jesus in the ways we see others extend mercy and grace. Repent of the times and places when we have excluded others. Embrace the fullness of the kingdom that Christ brings. Look for ways to participate in the kingdom of God now, even as we await its fulfillment when Christ returns, Become a people of love, grace, mercy, and peace.