

Jesus Enters into Jerusalem
Luke 19:28-40
Palm Sunday in Lent, Year C April 13, 2025
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Good morning, friends, as we gather on this Palm Sunday to worship Jesus, the king who comes in the name of the Lord. We're embarking on Holy Week, the most sacred time of the Christian calendar. This time culminates what began in Advent, as we awaited the birth of Jesus, God-with-us. We'll celebrate Jesus' resurrection next Sunday and then follow through for fifty days until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on the worshipers in Jerusalem.

Today, we turn our attention to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the events that followed that week. Again we are dealing with a familiar scene, one which appears in all four Gospels: Matthew 21:1-9, Mark 11:1-10, John 1:12-18, and Luke's account in Chapter 19, verses 28-40. Our focus today is on Luke's report, but I'd encourage you to compare that to the other three versions. I'd also like to point out that descriptions of entrance scenes were fairly common in the ancient world, since many kings and conquerors had entered Jerusalem over the years. So, Luke's readers would have recognized what was happening here.

Luke begins in verse 28 by referring to a parable Jesus had spoken before embarking on the final leg of his journey to Jerusalem. R. Alan Culpepper helps us to understand this parable of the ten pounds, a story about a greedy and vengeful king, by writing in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. IX, page 364):

The kingdom [of God] will not appear immediately (19:1). Disciples are called to be trustworthy while they wait for the coming of the king. They are to advance the king's interest, but rather than contributing to greed and the oppression of the poor by adding to the wealth of the wealthy, they will find it necessary to echo the protests of the bystanders.

We'll hear these protesters in verse 39, but for now we hear Jesus sending two of his disciples from the Mount of Olives, a hill on the eastern side of the Kidron Valley opposite Jerusalem, to run an errand for him. They are to go to a nearby village, probably Bethany, where we know Jesus has friends. There, they will find a colt that has never been ridden. They are to untie this animal and bring it to Jesus. The owners question the disciples as to what they are doing, to which they reply "the Lord needs it" (19:34). The owners do not reply, but the disciples' answer must have been satisfactory, because the animal's owners don't try to stop them.

I do want to point out something that always confused me as a child, having been taught all of the accounts of this Palm Sunday story that were somehow smushed together. Was Jesus riding a colt, a donkey, or both? The image in Matthew 21:5 indicates that he is mounted on two animals. But that's inaccurate, because this verse is quoted from Zechariah 9:9, which we English readers easily misinterpret. I had tried to picture Jesus straddling two animals, which seemed very awkward to me. When I was older and learned that in Hebrew poetry images were often repeated, but the second referred to the first. So, there is really only one animal.

And that animal is a donkey. In Zechariah, the king arrives humbly riding a donkey, which is described as a colt, the foal of a donkey. Scholar Joanne M. Pierce, points out that "in the Bible,

the word meaning ‘colt’ is used almost exclusively for young donkeys, not horses.” Who knew? I certainly didn’t! What this means, according to Zechariah, is that the coming ruler of God’s people, the Messiah, will triumphantly ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, which they would interpret as signs of humility and peacefulness. Surprisingly, at least to me, the donkey is also a sign of royalty. In fact, we’re told in 1 Kings 1:38 that Solomon rode to his anointing as king on a mule, a hybrid animal whose father would have been a donkey.

In Luke’s telling of the story, we see that Jesus is sitting on cloaks that have been thrown over the donkey. Moreover, as he proceeded along the parade route, people threw their cloaks on the road. In 2 Kings 9:13, we see an example of cloaks being spread on bare steps for the king to walk on, so the cloaks in Luke take on royal symbolism.

But wait, you say, what’s with the cloaks? I thought they were waving palm branches as they shouted. That’s an important detail for us. I imagine many of us remember marching down the center aisle of the church where we grew up, waving our palm fronds and singing an appropriate hymn, perhaps “The Palms” or “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna.” We associate palms with this special day, but the reality is that palms appear only in John’s account of the story.

As we watch the procession move down from the Mount of Olives, we hear “the whole multitude of the disciples [who] began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen” (19:37). Well, this sure gives us a lot to unpack. First we note that although the other Gospel writers refer to an unspecified crowd of people, Luke tells us that those who are shouting praises are Jesus’ disciples, that is, his own followers, not just a group of curious onlookers.

Moreover, we read that praises are being lifted in response to “deeds of power.” What might these be? Remember that Jesus has not only been teaching, but he has also been healing people, casting out demons, even performing resuscitation. His words were important, of course, but he showed God’s power by his deeds.

We find two distinct responses to Jesus. First, verse 38 combines Psalm 118:26 (part of what is known as a Hallel prayer, which would have been used to welcome pilgrims to a festival such as Passover), with Zechariah 9:9, which we have already examined. We note that Jesus has added “the king” to the original text. The psalm fits well with the festivities of the day, for in the time before the Exile (pre-586 B.C.), the people of Israel sang this as a hymn of royal entry in an annual ritual of enthronement.

We mentioned that there were two distinct responses to Jesus. Clearly, his disciples were praising the one they believed would bring peace on earth and glory to God in heaven. But not everyone in the crowd saw things this way. There were some Pharisees who encouraged Jesus to make his disciples pipe down. We aren’t told here exactly why they did this, but as we’ve noted before, the religious establishment wanted to keep its head down for fear of upsetting the Roman authorities. Yelling about a king coming, when as far as Rome was concerned the only king was the Roman Emperor, could cause the local politicians to tighten the screws on what the Jewish people would be allowed to do. Another possible reason for the Pharisees to cry out is that they wanted to stop Jesus from fulfilling his mission.

Reacting to the Pharisees request, Jesus makes no effort to stop his disciples and instead says that if they were silent, “the stones would shout out” (19:40). As we’ve often seen, Jesus doesn’t just make stuff up on the spot. No, he digs into his rich religious heritage for ideas and quotations. Here, he quotes words of judgment from the prophet Habakkuk (2:9-11):

“Alas for you who get evil gain for your house,
setting your nest on high
to be safe from the reach of harm!”

¹⁰ You have devised shame for your house
by cutting off many peoples;
you have forfeited your life.

¹¹ The very stones will cry out from the wall,
and the rafter will respond from the woodwork.

I don't think it's a coincidence that this is the last we hear of the Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke. They are definitely on the wrong side here. Luke's account makes clear that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem confirms that he is a king, while clearly distinguishing him from any earthly king.

And on this Palm Sunday, we need to consider how Jesus is a king unlike any other. His power is rooted in his vulnerability. He brings healing to many. He is deeply humble, not wanting to lord anything over anyone. He brings peace. He stands on the side of the least, the last, the lost, and has what had in more recent times been called “a preferential option for the poor.” This is who Jesus' disciples were following, trying to live up to his example.

What about us? Are you walking in the footsteps of Jesus as he heads into Jerusalem on a road that will soon take him to Golgotha on the outskirts of the city? Are you ready to leave the sanctuary on a high note today, shouting praise, or do you recognize that there are other days to get through this week before we celebrate Jesus' victory over death on Easter?

Since we will not be having another service before next Sunday, let's review the events of Holy Week. Scholars debate the exact order, and there are some differences among the four Gospels, but Pastor Mary Fairchild offers a timeline that seems reasonable. The first day of Holy Week is, of course, Palm Sunday, which we've already explored. Jesus spent the night in Bethany with his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

The events of Monday are recorded Matthew 21:12–22, Mark 11:15–19, Luke 19:45–48, and John 2:13–17. Jesus left Bethany and returned to Jerusalem. Along the way, he cursed a fig tree that failed to bear fruit. Arriving at the temple, he overturned the tables of the money changers. Jesus and the disciples may have again spent the night with Lazarus and his sisters.

On Tuesday, Jesus and his disciples head back the two miles to Jerusalem. Along the way, they pass a withered fig tree, giving Jesus the opportunity to talk about the importance of a living faith. When he got to the Temple, the religious leaders wanted to trap him for lifting himself up as a spiritual authority, but he judged them instead. That afternoon, he and his entourage went to the Mount of Olives where he talked about the end of the age, the destruction of the temple, and his Second Coming. Some time that day, Judas discussed with the Jewish Council his plans for betraying Jesus. Tuesday's events are recorded in Matthew 21:23–24:51, Mark 11:20–13:37, Luke 20:1–21:36, and John 12:20–38.

The Bible is silent as to exactly what happened on Wednesday. Some commentators speculate that Jesus and his friends rested in Bethany. This could have been the day that we are told Mary anointed Jesus' feet with nard.

Now we come to Thursday and events that are very familiar to us. This is the day that Jesus and his friends celebrated Passover together in the Upper Room. That night, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and he also instituted what we call Holy Communion. When the meal was over, Jesus and eleven of his disciples left for the Garden of Gethsemane where he prayed

fervently, asking God to let this cup pass from him, but he also expressed his willingness to do what the Father asked of him. Later that night, Judas arrived in the Garden with temple leaders, who took him to the home of the High Priest, Caiaphas. In the wee hours of the morning, he faced a trial and had no one to speak up for him. It was at this time that Peter betrayed Jesus three times. We can read about Thursday's events in Matthew 26:17–75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, and John 13:1-38.

Next we come to Good Friday, the most solemn day of the Christian calendar. It was on this day that Jesus was crucified and buried. Judas committed suicide early on Friday morning. At about 9 a.m. Jesus was mocked, beaten, sentenced to death, crowned with thorns, and made to carry the crossbeam of his cross. Once nailed to this cruel instrument of torture, he spoke seven last words before taking his last breath at about 3 p.m. By 6 p.m., Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, two "closet" disciples who were members of the Jewish Council, claimed the body and carefully placed it in Joseph's new tomb. The events of Friday are recorded in Matthew 27:1-62, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 22:63-23:56, and John 18:28-19:37.

On Saturday, Jesus' body reposed in the tomb, where according to Matthew, it was guarded by Roman soldiers. When the Sabbath ended at 6 p.m., Jesus' body was ceremonially anointed with myrrh and aloe spices for burial that Nicodemus had purchased. He and Joseph took a huge risk to identify themselves as followers of Jesus by preparing his body for burial. Saturday's events are recorded in Matthew 27:62-66, Mark 16:1, Luke 23:56, and John 19:40.

His work was finished and by his sacrifice we have been restored to God. But this is not the end of the story. That comes next Sunday on Easter, also known as the Day of Resurrection.

Your challenge this week—and this is a difficult one—is to read about the events of Holy Week. How does all of this affect you personally and as a church? How do you respond? Nan