

JESUS' JOURNEY AS A FAITHFUL JEW  
"Which Parade Wave?"  
March 28, 2021; 9:00 am  
Mark 11:1-11  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

**11** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!<sup>[a]</sup>"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

## **TWO PARADES**

### **A. Borg/Crossan Description**

"Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. It was the beginning of the week of Passover, the most

sacred week of the Jewish year. In the centuries since, Christians have celebrated the day as Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week. With its climax of Good Friday and Easter, it is the most sacred week of the Christian year."  
Thus begins *The Last Week*, a book about Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem, by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.

"One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class.

They had journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee, about a hundred miles to the north. Mark's story of Jesus and the kingdom of God has been aiming for Jerusalem, pointing toward Jerusalem. It has now arrived.

On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus's procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus's crucifixion.

"Imagine the imperial procession's arrival in the city. A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. And the sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums."

### **B. Imperial Display**

THIS was the way to *do* a parade! Pomp and glitz—a display of everything big and strong and showy. Passover was a time when the Jews might get a little rowdy—maybe stage a protest;

so Big Brother Rome showed up to keep the people in line—keep them under the thumb even more than usual. Pilate wasn't going to let things get out of hand—not on his watch!

For the Jewish people this Pilate Parade was a painful reminder, right in the midst of their Passover hoopla—a time they celebrated their deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh all those years ago—here they were in 30 AD not that far from their Land of Egypt. In bondage again, occupied, oppressed.

### C. Ragtag Band

This *other* little parade—this “donkey capade”—must have looked almost ridiculous by comparison. No pomp, no glitz, no glitter. No fancy chariots; just a hobbling little donkey with a poor, backwater, peasant on it and more scraggly, poverty-stricken followers bringing up the rear.

This one had no shining gold or glistening silver—just some coats placed on the ground by the onlookers and folks waving palm branches as they passed. Nothing too exciting; not real impressive. If you were in the audience, which parade would YOU want to watch?

### **CONTRASTING THEOLOGIES**

Two parades. With two very different purposes and theologies. You see, there was much more than a political demonstration going on here. Each parade proclaimed a message about God—about who was running things around here, and deserving of homage and adoration.

For in Rome, the emperor was considered to be divine. He was referred to as "Lord," "Savior," and "Son of God," the one who had brought: "peace on earth." This was declared of Tiberius, the emperor during Jesus' ministry, and Pilate, his representative, would be coming in his name: “in the name of the Lord.”

Back at our little ragtag procession, the crowd is calling *Jesus*

Lord! Talk about not being politically-correct! "Hosanna! God saves! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." We sing it every year as we traipse around the sanctuary waving our palm branches. Do we have any idea what we're saying with those familiar words? It's a radical declaration! Might have cost you your head in those days!

To say that Jesus is Lord. Not pharaoh, not the emperor, not anyone or any power in this world. When we choose *this* parade, we choose an alternative vision—Jesus' Way—the Kingdom of God; *not* the imperial kingdom that we find ourselves in—that surrounds us—that worships power, glory and violence.

Borg and Crossan pose the question to *us*:

“Two processions entered Jerusalem on that day. The same question, the same alternative, faces those who would be faithful to Jesus today. Which procession are we in? Which procession do we want to be in? This is the question of Palm Sunday and of the week that is about to unfold.” (Borg & Crossan, p. 30)

### **WHICH PARADE?**

Jesus' parade is a different kind of parade. His Way of coming among the people and offering them a vision and hope is very *different* from Rome's and Pilate's parade. Jesus' leadership is Servant Leadership. Pilate's is “Law and Order”—keeping that order by threats and violence.

Which parade would we choose, if we were on the streets of Jerusalem that day? That parade of the “Prince of Peace” or the “King of Might Makes Right”?

Whose movement, message and leadership would you be willing to lay down your cloak for?

### **SAVE US, NOW!**

Rev. Cheryl Lindsay suggests that before we

answer that question and decide which parade we would be in, we take a closer look at the crowd and what they might be shouting and looking for. She questions:

“I wonder if we don’t get Palm Sunday quite right...from the crowd’s point of view. I wonder if those cries from the crowd were pleas of **desperation** rather than shouts of joy. How does our understanding of this event change when we consider, deeply, the meaning of the word “Hosanna!”

“Many of us know that it means, “Please save us!” or “Save us now!” But consider for a moment, under what circumstances do people ask to be “saved”?

“*Those* cries came from a people whose lives were in **peril**—there’s no other reason to ask to be saved. “Hosanna!” isn’t a cheer; it’s a declaration of an emergency expressed as praise toward the God who hears, cares, and responds.”

“Hosanna! Save us now, Lord!” Was this celebration or desperation? What did it mean for them? What does it mean for us? Now?

What do WE need saving from, in our communal life, right now? Could it be disease, poverty, despair, worldwide racism and growing authoritarianism and supremacy of some that leads to the extinction of others?

Could it be the growing divides in our own country that threaten our democracy? The growing numbness to violence and mass terror that seeps in and keeps us stuck—feeling like there’s nothing we can do to change things?

What are *we* calling out to Jesus to save us from today? This week and last our cries are very specific—and should be. For hate crimes are happening as we speak—against Asians and others of color right here in our own country. Against folks of every walk of life, ethnicity and religion.

As I was writing this message on Weds. I received this from Pastor and Author Jennifer Butler:

“You’ve heard about two of them—in Atlanta and Boulder—but CNN reports that over the course of seven days in March we have had **seven** mass shootings. This is not a one-off problem. It is a result of a deep crisis in our society.”

I wonder if our ‘Hosanna’ might need to be: “Save us, Lord, from ourselves! From our own inability to work out our differences and competitiveness over resources *without* violence! Save us from our roaring yells and refusing-to-listen ears that prevent us, over and over, from enacting legislation that would make it harder to kill en masse.”

“We refuse to compromise to our own peril, Jesus, and we know you must surely weep.”

### **JESUS FACED JERUSALEM**

Let’s go back to that day, with Jesus and see what he was facing as we choose our parade.

Jesus has been to Jerusalem before—but this is not a joyful trip to a festival with his friends this time. Jerusalem exerts a “gravitational pull” on Jesus. And he knows what awaits him there—he has spoken of it to his disciples several times—whether or not they’ve heard or understood him.

How much easier it would *be* to stay in the countryside! Out at Bethany with his friends. Where warm welcome and hospitality, food and comfort are always waiting. How tempting to go back there yet again and not keep facing Jerusalem. Easier to stay away from the tumult, the protests, the state-sanctioned violence and daily killings.

For, you see, the hillside just outside Jerusalem—Golgotha—was *full* of crosses. Every day. Full of crosses with people on them. For Pilate loved crucifixion as a means of “law and order. Of “keeping the peace.”

Anyone who dared to resist the Roman government or even barely stir up a crowd—either inciting them to violence, or inciting them to hope that a better life was possible!—was a quick and easy target for that hillside. Pilate liked to nail first and ask questions later.

But Jesus *still* kept going there—to the city. He *saw* the hillsides full of crosses. He knew what he was facing as he faced Jerusalem.

Jesus and all those other pilgrims still kept going there, because they were longing for the messianic promise to be fulfilled. Hoping against hope that God would send a Savior to free them from Roman occupation, oppression and slavery—JUST like God had freed their forebears from slavery and the tyranny so long ago in Egypt.

How powerful that gravitational force must have been for Jesus, when he knew the risk! Something must have kept him up at night, when he could have stayed safely at a distance—out in the country!

Was it “*Hosanna! Please, please save us!*” that echoed in his dreams? A *desperate* cry for help from the children of God? Those starving, anything-but-free-masses living under a thumb more oppressive and unjust than anything we can imagine in our day?

(Or can we? Can we imagine the life journey and experience of people right next door to us, living in poverty, fearing to go out to go out because they are not safe—due to the color of their skin or ethnic background?)

Right in their own towns and neighborhoods.  
Right in OUR own towns and neighborhoods.

What if? What if that “Hosanna” cry that we have sung and marched to all these centuries in the Christian Church was NOT a parade chant on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at all? Not a happy yahoo! let’s

have a fun festival, a BBQ, and sing and wave our palm branches—after all?

What if it truly *was* a cry for help from the crowd? From desperate, yet hopeful, people willing to lay down their only coats on the road—maybe a very muddy road—to be trampled in desperation and hope? All rolled into one. Looking to one possible Savior—there—riding on a lowly donkey?

What Savior, promised by God, over centuries, did Jesus represent for them so powerfully that they would prostrate themselves and their bodies and coats on that roadside? In defiance of the other parade that was happening just across town? The other motorcade—with chariots and steeds—warhorses much more impressive than Jesus’ wobbly little awkward burro?

That *other* parade, that was also happening as a way to “keep the peace.” To remind everyone who’s boss—who is in charge, where the power is held and how their homage BETTER be directed. Or else.

### **WHAT PARADE?**

What parade were they waving in? What courage and faith it must have taken to wave those palm branches and shout for help to Jesus and not the Empire?

Any one of them could have ended up on a cross on the hillside—simply for being there. For shouting “Hosanna.” It wouldn’t matter that their coat was trampled in the mud now. You don’t need a coat anymore when you’re hanging on a cross or a lynching tree.

What we will bring to the parade? What branches will WE wave? What songs of salvation and hope will we sing? What will we wave as branches of peace? Olive branches to extend—to offer healing and hopes for reconciliation and reparation?

The crowd—then and now—represents all kinds of folks and

perspectives. Some were disappointed in his humble, servant leadership model. Really, Jesus?! This is not gonna cut it! Compassion, mercy, love, understanding? That's wussy! What kind of strong leadership gifts and platforms are those?! What exactly do you hope to accomplish with that? We need law and order. To show who's really in charge.

Jesus's way is disappointment to those who worship authority and control. Watch the crowd later in the week. The crowd cheers Jesus on one day and berates him a few days later. Disappointment—when someone or some scene doesn't live up to our expectations—is a powerful and sometimes evil force. It leads us to do and believe some crazy movements and messages.

### **URGENCY IS NOW**

Mark uses “immediately” a lot in his gospel—there is no time to iron out events. A sense of urgency for Mark and there should be for us. Yet again, a racial hate-crime, with intersections with misogyny and body-and-soul-killing stereotypes with domestic terrorism has rocked our land.

Do we feel any urgency to respond, or is this more business as usual? I learned this week far more about issues and fears and violence that Asian Americans experience just in daily living in America (their home as much as ours!) than I ever have in my life. Where have I been?!

My cousin married a Japanese man decades ago—when we were all in college—and raised two brilliant, amazing, and beautiful daughters in Colorado. She's been telling me and our family about this struggle and terrible stereotypes for years—including her in-laws' experience in internment camps—but I don't think I listened nearly as thoroughly, and enough with my heart, as I should.

As we all should. The time is now. The time is urgent. Black, brown, Asian, native, LGBTQ+, Muslim, Christian, Jewish Sikh—all are experiencing hate crimes in our land in astronomically

higher numbers—*recently!* In our neighborhoods, under our noses, on our watch. And our silence.

Have we been asleep at the wheel? Promoting or at least allowing attitudes to reign and be expressed and gain momentum that excuse any discrimination or continued hate and violence? That is aiding and abetting the Parade led by Pilate, I'm afraid. Rendering unto Caesar what is NOT Caesar's to command.

What parade will we wave in?

Which parade wave will be ours? On this day of adoration, celebration and life-or-death decision?

### **Prayer by Kathy Swaar**

Hosanna!

Blessed are you, Holy One.

Blessed are you who comes in the Name of the Lord,  
you Whose kingdom is not static.

You come, you go, you equip, you send.

You send us: into the village, into the countryside,  
into every town and place,  
into all the world.

And with us goes the blessing of your Presence.

Let us never forget that.

Let us never forget that wherever we go, whatever we do—  
whether the road leads to triumphant acclamation  
or through the valley of the shadow—or both—  
You are present with us, in every moment, in every step.

So let us give thanks.

Let us give thanks and rejoice in God's Presence.

Let us give thanks for the beauty of creation;

Let us give thanks for the foundation of faith

that holds us fast and keeps us even in the midst of pain and struggle.

Let us give thanks for the Blessed One  
who comes with salvation and mercy.  
As the crowds laid down cloaks and branches on the road,  
so may we lay down our hearts and lives—  
all we have and all we are—  
an offering of love, in response to your great love.  
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna!

Jesus may well have been kept up at night. Cries of “Hosanna!  
Jeshua! God, please save us now!” may have been God’s way of  
nudging him out into the street. Compelling him to keep facing  
Jerusalem, confronting the violence and taking the risk that the  
world needed.

He walked the Via Dolorosa—the Way of Suffering—out of love.  
A deliberate choice to show a different Way—a walking with,  
alongside, in solidarity with those who suffer—even if that Way  
leads to death—to laying down one’s life.

He chose to walk that road out of love. May we choose our path  
with courage, out of love, alongside Jesus as we enter this  
Passion week. Amen.

SONG: Via Dolorosa