

Today is April 5th, Palm Sunday, and the day that begins the holiest week of the year, literally called Holy Week, when we get in step with Jesus and walk with Him to the cross. We usually participate in Maundy Thursday services as Jesus shared the last supper with his disciples, then our Good Friday Stations of the Cross at Faith on 68, then of course, our celebratory Easter Sunday services as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I've got my Palm cross right here, and we have yours for you as well. We'll distribute them on our first return to worship in our sanctuary.

This week's lectionary readings are Isaiah 50:4-9 for the Old Testament reading, Psalm 118, the Epistle lesson is Philippians 2:5-11, and our gospel lesson is Matthew 21:1-11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 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.^[a]" 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^[b] 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.”

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 21:3](#) Or ‘The Lord needs them and will send them back immediately.’
- b. [Matthew 21:8](#) Or Most of the crowd

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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“He Is Coming” – Pastor Donna Douthett – Palm Sunday, April 5 – Matthew 21:1-11

Remember this kind of question from high school or college achievement tests: ¹“Train A, traveling 70 miles per hour (mph), leaves Westford heading toward Eastford, 260 miles away. At the same time Train B, traveling 60 mph, leaves Eastford heading toward Westford. When do the two trains meet? How far from each city do they meet?”

I didn’t get it then, and I don’t get it now. All I know is that two trains are going to meet head-on sooner or later.

That’s what I think about when I read this scripture for Palm Sunday. Why? Because we have two powerful entities streaming head-on toward each other and there’s certain to be a crash.

¹ <http://mathforum.org/dr.math/faq/faq.two.trains.html>

We have two royal processions entering Jerusalem... One procession came from the east. That group was composed of followers of a man called Jesus. He comes into Jerusalem riding on a donkey with a lot of fanfare. He is the king of the Jews.

People are crying out as they process with him, in front, around, and behind him, “Hosanna, Hosanna,” meaning from the Greek “save us, save us!” If you remember from any of your Bible studies, this fulfills the prophecies from Zechariah 9:9 that the Messianic King would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. Hear now that scripture from Zechariah: *9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

On the other side of town, from the west comes another procession consisting of Pontius Pilot, the Roman governor and his entourage. He’s riding a war horse at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. He’s been sent there to maintain law and order during the days of the Jewish festival of Passover. Buzz is in the air that there might be trouble on the horizon.

²Biblical scholar, John Rollefson compares these two processions like this: He says, “Jesus’ procession proclaimed the kingdom of God,” while Pilate’s proclaimed the “power of the empire”, thereby embodying the “central conflict of the week that led to Jesus’ crucifixion.”

If you recall, last week in my message about being “restored,” I said that the plot against Jesus was thickening after all these miracles and

² Feasting on the Word, Year A, volume 2, p. 153

confrontations with the Pharisees, and that people in power, both religious and political, started plotting against Jesus. Now the pot is really beginning to boil.

Our scripture this morning states the very same. It says, *“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”* The sheer volume of his followers and their enthusiasm for this man called Jesus was foreign to the locals. They’d never heard of this man that others are proclaiming a prophet. But others are crying out Hosanna! Alleluia! Uh-Oh! It’s a clash of cultures and believers.

I remember our friend Henry Weins, who was instrumental in the music provided for the original House at 10 that turned into our Faith on 68 contemporary worship, played a song that I always felt was heaving with emotion. It is titled, ³*“Alleluia, He Is Coming.”* I can never sing that song without truly being able to visual the image of Jesus walking toward the cross. The simplistic opening lines of the lyrics go like this:

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-coming

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-coming

down the road

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Put yourself in Jerusalem that beautiful day...the day when you could have looked up and seen your Lord coming! Wouldn’t you shout Alleluia too?

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8GXsqPbrl>

But the rejoicing was short-lived because the political unrest and those plotting against Jesus carried the day. Then next thing you know, we've changed our tune as our beloved Jesus is crucified on the day we call Good Friday.

Good Friday. Hmmmm...To me it's a sorrowful day. I've often wondered why do we call Good Friday "good," when it is such a dark and bleak event commemorating a day of suffering and death for Jesus?

For Christians, Good Friday is a crucial day of the year because it celebrates what we believe to be the most momentous weekend in the history of the world. On Good Friday we remember the day Jesus willingly suffered and died by crucifixion as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

Still, why call the day of Jesus' death "Good Friday" instead of "Bad Friday" or something similar?

Here's a little insight: some Christian traditions DO take this approach. In Germany, for example, the day is called "Sorrowful Friday." In English, in fact, the origin of the term "Good" is debated: some believe it developed from an older name, "God's Friday." Regardless of the origin, the name Good Friday IS entirely appropriate because the suffering and death of Jesus, as terrible as it was, marked the dramatic culmination of God's plan to save his people from their sins.

So now, we're coming to the second verse of that song that says:

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-dying

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-dying

on a tree

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

But then three days later, we change our lyrics again, because It is followed by Easter, the glorious celebration of the day Jesus was raised from the dead, heralding his victory over sin and death and pointing ahead to a future resurrection for all who are united to him by faith.

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-rising

I looked up and I saw my Lord a-rising

from the grave

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

I had hoped and prayed that this day of Palm Sunday, we would be worshipping together. I could visualize the children going up and down the aisles...Jaxson, Breanna, the Beightley gang, Ally and Connor...waving their palms, then haphazardly passing out your palm crosses to you.

We would share the Lord's Table on this holy day of celebration, remembering as we did the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples.

But no...here we are...sitting in front of a screen...worshipping together virtually. Perhaps we need to be shouting Hosanna, Hosanna, (Save us! Save us!) too!

Hosanna! God is with us! As we begin this holy week, watch your email and Facebook posts each day for ideas and special thoughts we can share together.

As we wait for the solemn day of crucifixion and then the glorious resurrection, remember,

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Alleluia He is coming, alleluia He is here

Amen.



Twelfth-century fresco of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah 9:9 prophesies that the Messianic King would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (see Mt 21:5; Jn 12:15). Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, c. 1125, Master of San Baudel (fl.1125)/Indianapolis Museum of Art, USA/Gift of G.H.A. Clowes and Elijah B. Martindale/The Bridgeman Art Library