

Worship for Palm/ Passion Sunday
April 2, 2023

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Lenten Reading Mark 11:1-11 Nancy McIntosh

*Call to Worship

Humble and riding on a donkey,

we greet you.

Acclaimed by crowds and caroled by children,

we cheer you.

Moving from the peace of the countryside

to the corridors of power,

we salute you, Christ, our Lord.

You are giving the beasts of burden a new dignity;

You are giving majesty a new face;

You are giving those who long for redemption

a new song to sing.

With them, with heart and voice,

we shout, "Hosanna! God save us!"

*Hymn 197 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Prayer of the Day

We praise you, O God,

for your redemption of the world through Jesus Christ.

Today he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph

and was proclaimed Messiah and King

by those who spread garments and branches along his way.

Let these branches be signs of victory,

and grant that we, who carry them, may follow him in the way of the cross,

that dying and rising with him, we may enter into your kingdom,

through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

First Reading

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.

You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love.

By your mercy, help us to live in your light and walk in your ways, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and we may dwell in peace. Amen.

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 19:28-40

Morning Message

“The Lord has need of it.”

Years ago, on one of our trips to Ireland, our tour director took Ed aside to consult about a situation. The issue was the hotel had two guests, two older women traveling together, who were stranded in Dublin. Overnight, the country was ground to a halt due to a transportation strike. The women suddenly had no way to reach their destination. If they could ride with us to a particular town, a family member could meet them and drive them the rest of the way.

Well, of course they were welcome to join us. The tour guide seated them up front and we treated them to both Irish and American hospitality.

For me, what immediately came to mind was this text, of Jesus sending his disciples into town to retrieve a donkey. If they were questioned about it, they were to simply say, “The Lord has need of it.”

What was needed on that brisk spring morning in Dublin appeared to be a ride to the next town. The Lord didn’t need a donkey that day. He needed a bus.

Let’s take a closer look at the donkey in the story.

We may think of donkeys as slow and stubborn, not particularly intelligent, homely, certainly not as impressive as a horse. A donkey was more affordable for the average family. It would not run away. Its lack of speed is a blessing. Donkeys are strong. They are loyal. They are protective. I have heard stories about donkeys intentionally placing themselves between a flock of sheep and a coyote, taking the attack upon themselves to save the other, more vulnerable creatures.

So, Jesus sits upon the humble donkey, the disciples and the crowd placing their cloaks along the road, waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna! God save us!"

Now contrast this with what was happening on the other side of Jerusalem:

New Testament scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, write that the triumphal entry was less of a parade and more of a protest. They maintain it was political theatre. Jesus' entry into the Holy City was to mock the obscene pomp and circumstance of Rome.

They argue that there were two processions to enter Jerusalem that day. Every year, the Roman governor of Judea would ride up to Jerusalem from his coastal residence in the west, specifically to be present in the city for Passover-the Jewish festival that swelled Jerusalem's population from its usual 50, 000 to at least 200, 000 people.

The governor would come in all his imperial majesty to remind the Jews that Rome was in charge.

"It would have been a visual display of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather, armor, helmets, weapons, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums, the swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent on-lookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."

According to Roman belief, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, he was the Son of God. So, this entry of Pilate was both a potent military threat and the embodiment of a rival theology.

Pilate clanged and crashed his way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, looking pretty absurd. This was the procession of the powerless, the explicitly vulnerable. You can't get more defenseless than to ride on a nursing mama donkey, with her colt walking along beside her.

We have been back from Ireland for a week. Sometimes it takes awhile to settle in and process the trip. There's a lot to process. We were a group of 43. Each of us having expectations and some minor challenges. The word of the day was always "adapt." If you want to travel, you have to be flexible.

On our trek across the country we came upon a rag-tag camp of sorts. The only thing I can compare it to is a homeless encampment along the riverbank here. A couple of broken down trailers. Windows boarded up, others with towels tacked up to the windowframes. Trash strewn everywhere, a few discarded toys, tattered clothing hanging on a rope between two trees. And a few hungry-looking dogs, a pig or two, chickens walking about, and a donkey. It was tied to a picnic table.

I had seen places like this before on previous trips. But, it was still shocking and painful to know people lived in these desperate conditions. They are alternately called Roma, travelers, tinkers, and gypsies, although the word “gypsy” is not used in Ireland. It would be akin to using the “N” word here.

The people who inhabit the camp are nomadic. They move from place to place looking for work. It is an impoverished lifestyle. Children are uneducated for the most part. We can imagine that access to health care is limited. One look at the camp told us that they were living in squalor, without adequate food, clothing, or shelter. Do they want to live this way? They can't. Like some here in our country, these people are caught in generational dysfunction.

I've done a little research since we've been back. There are public measures being undertaken to address the plight of these people. There is special concern for the children and the elderly, as you can imagine. But any attempt to rehabilitate a community requires cooperation and that is unpredictable.

I wonder if that donkey will spend its life tethered to a picnic table.

“The Lord has need of it.”

It strikes me that this is the type of community and the circumstances of the men, women, and children for whom Jesus' heart broke. Poor, needy, rejected. Their possessions few and the most valuable tied up so it can't escape.

Where is their hope? Where will they ever find relief? Do they want relief? We don't yet know.

And we don't know whether anyone who lined the street that day in Jerusalem understood what Jesus was enacting by riding into the city mounted on a donkey.

I doubt they grasped the ultimate meaning in it. They weren't interested in the donkey. They were primed for revolution. They wanted and expected something world-changing, a revolution. But Jesus knew what it would cost him to spit in Rome's face.

Debie Thomas says that what he accomplished on that loud and chaotic day was to fulfill the will of God. He fulfilled the scriptures that prophesied that the Messiah would come riding on a donkey. He died because he exposed the ungracious sham at the heart of all human kingdoms, and ignited fury. Even when he knew his actions would send him to his death, Jesus set his face “like flint” towards Jerusalem. He mounted a donkey and took Rome for a ride.

Blogger Andrew King describes that special day in poetry:

Jerusalem’s past had been quite a blast
when David was monarch and splendid.
But centuries had gone since David passed on,
and God’s blessing seemed to have ended.

Jerusalem’s streets had seen happy feet
taking people to great holy places.
A place it was now of deep-furrowed brows,
on saddened and wearisome faces.

Rome, you recall, had control of it all,
and its soldiers could be pretty scary.
A grumbling noise might upset Caesar’s boys
so the people had learned to be wary.

How Jerusalem longed to sing happy songs
that would celebrate their story;
they dreamed and they prayed to give
a parade
for a new David marching in glory.

Then came a year when they got some cheer;
there was a man to whom people pointed.
Of him it was said he could raise the dead-
he just might be God’s anointed!

A carpenter’s son, he became someone
with words that could set hearts singing;
his caring stand for woman and man
had the title “Messiah” now ringing.

“He’s coming straight to Jerusalem’s gate,”

the folk were excitedly saying;
“Let’s get out there in the open air
and show the Romans what we’ve been praying.”

They cut branches down and handed them ‘round,
a symbol of joy and praising
And they lined the way for Jesus that day,
palms and voices ready for raising.

Jesus, meantime, had his followers find
a young donkey on which he could ride.
He’d come to that place to show God’s saving grace,
that God’s on the sufferers’ side.

Loving and meek, no power would he seek,
as he sat on the donkey so humble.
Soon enough on that road he’d be bearing a load;
a cross that would cause him to stumble.

So in Jesus came, and the strong and the lame
tossed their palm leaves and shouted their praise,
“Hosanna!” they cried. “The King has come by!
Hosanna! God grant us new days!”

Hosannas like “God save us!” and what Jesus gave
was the way that God’s love makes that happen.
So lift up your palms, get your happy smile on,
and be ready for singin’ and clappin’;

Because every day can be Palm Sunday
when you know that Jesus is near you;
Give praise to God, from the sky to the sod;
shout “God saves!” so all folks can hear you!

Untie that donkey! The Lord has need of it!
The Lord has need of you.

Hosanna!

*Affirmation of Faith The Nicene Creed p. 34

*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

* Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.

Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts.

Use us and what we have gathered,

In feeding the world with your love,

Through the one who gave himself for us,

Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

*Hymn 196 All Glory, Laud, and Honor

*Blessing

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

*Postlude