

# Giving the People What they Want to Hear: a Palm Sunday sermon on mark 11:1-11

Pastor Amanda, March 25

This week, the Christian church turns our eye to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where the final week of Jesus' life unfolds. His calendar would read like this:

Sunday: Arrive in Jerusalem, on a colt, just like the prophets said he would

Monday: Visit the temples. Criticize the economic system. Throw some tables.

Tuesday: Meetings with leaders, let them know Jerusalem will soon be destroyed.

Wednesday: Dinner at a friend's house— she anointed him with oil. Side note: Judas was there, and shortly after decided to betray Jesus.

Thursday: Passover dinner with friends. After supper, he is arrested.

Friday: sham trial, political execution

Saturday: dead (silence)

Sunday: come back next week to hear about that

Since so much of our story this week takes place in Jerusalem, it would be a good idea to review a bit of what we know of Jerusalem in the days of Jesus.

We think of Jerusalem as the Jewish homeland. In the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was clearly under Roman control. The western side of the city included one of the greatest constructions of the era: the Palace of Herod the Great, built around ten years before the birth of Jesus, known throughout the world for its size and splendor.

On the eastern side of the city was the second Jewish Temple, built in about 500 years before the birth of Jesus.

With it being the time of Passover, the Roman Empire would have significantly increased their presence in the city. Pilate was visiting and stayed in the palace. Because the conquered people (the Jews) would often fight back against the Roman Empire, Rome sent additional legions to the city to "keep the peace." They would have certainly had a parade in the city of all those legions. Chariot wheels would be creaking, horses sweating and stomping their feet. The armor would be polished to a high shine. All of this was to remind the Jewish people who was in control of their home. They would march in step in long, practiced lines. A powerful military parade. Empire in action.

Jesus friends and followers wanted him to do something, to show he was the messiah they knew him to be. He finally said it was time. He had to go to Jerusalem. What better time to go than during the Passover, when the people celebrated freedom from slavery in Egypt. He would go. The Kingdom of God is here.

I think what happened is someone remembered the words from the old prophet Zechariah (9:9) who said *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.*

That was all it took to get the plan started. Someone went ahead and arranged for the colt. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. He would arrive from the East, passing through Bethany on his way. We just heard about this

parade, people crowding in to see Jesus, spreading branches cut from trees, even their own cloaks on the road. They shout Hosanna, here comes our king.

What a contrast to the military parade near the palace. Jesus rides a colt (a donkey), not a war horse. The second half of Zechariah's words (9:10) makes the contrast even starker:

*He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

War horses and soldiers marching in step on the Roman side of town, Jesus representing peace to the nations on the eastern side.

Friends, Palm Sunday is a reminder that Jesus is all about politics. We cannot domesticate Jesus or take politics out of the church. Jesus will get mad this week. He will protest. All through this, he will remind people that his Kingdom is so different from the Roman empire. This is a man who made sure people were fed, healed, seen and loved. God's Kingdom is coming.

The Empire will strike back.

Easter is a reminder that not even death will stop God's Kingdom from coming.

Last week in the older kids Sunday school class, we talked about the two kingdoms that bookend the Bible. We started with Genesis and the goodness in the beginning. The kingdom of God also shows up in the last book of the Bible, in Revelation. And there, that kingdom, it's the peace and goodness we have been longing for. We live in the middle of this- we named things wrong in the world and things that were signs of good things. The conversations remind us the perfection of the past is long gone, and the good kingdom seems so far off.

Teenagers, youth, adults—all of us are a part of leaning into God's kingdom. I appreciate the words of Jewish Rabbi Hillel "living in a way that might hasten the perfection of the world." [thank you to Rabbi David Locketz who spoke about Hillel on JRLC Day on the Hill.]

We, as people who follow Jesus, need to be involved in making a way for God's kingdom to show up. Sometimes that means being political. . . that was the case for me this week. My conviction that I am part of bringing forth the Kingdom compelled me to write a check, send some emails and participate in a march. It is Minnesota Food share month (as you know). Our local food shelves make sure people in our community have food to eat. Because our food shelves do not receive enough government funding to make sure everyone can eat, the churches step up in March and raise money. Last year the March campaign raised 8 million dollars to feed Minnesotans who were hungry. In God's kingdom, a place of loaves and fishes, people are not hungry. So I wrote a check. (hold up— don't forget to put it in the offering plate.) Thy Kingdom come.

I didn't just write a check last week, I also wrote a couple of letters. In February, the Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid informed Minnesota's Department of Human Services that previously approved investments in the Disability Waiver Rate System would be denied, resulting in a cut of 7% to the rates for community based disability services. I wrote to my representative and senator in the Minnesota legislature to thank them for their support of the two bills, one in the house, one in the senate that will ensure continued funding for the programs that support Minnesotans with disabilities. [If you have questions about this, ask me after the service. If you live in Wisconsin, they are looking at the ending cuts in a very different and scary way, through narrowing access to assistance programs.] In God's kingdom, the least, the lost and the left out are cared for. So I wrote some letters. Thy Kingdom come.

It was a busy week, but I didn't just write a check, and write some letters. As a friend from Christ Church put it, yesterday I "prayed with my feet" while walking from Peace Plaza in Rochester with the March for our Lives. This was organized by young people who spoke of how "enough is enough" and "not one more" child should have to experience a school shooting. Speakers spoke of their experiences with gun ownership and smart gun control and dreamed of a day when their children would not have to practice "lock down drills." It was incredible. Yet Rochester Police chief Roger Peterson reminded us in his speech: "When this walk is over, your work is not over." In God's kingdom, there is peace in all nations. Thy Kingdom come.

Following Jesus means we are people who are working for his coming kingdom. Sometimes that's messy, hard and political work. It has costs. But it also means that even when the empire threatens, strikes back and achieves momentary victories, in the end, love wins. God's Kingdom comes. We are Easter people, working for that day. Amen.

Marching for our lives is a Palm Sunday tradition since Jesus organized the first one. [didn't make the sermon, but too good a quote to not share! Stolen from the internet, source unknown.]

\*\*\*I cannot write Holy Week sermons anymore without returning to "The Last Week" by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. Thank you for writing this indispensable volume. \*\*\*