

The Non-Triumphal Entry: Matthew 21:1-11

Covenant Church Sermon

Palm Sunday: Sunday, April 14, 2019

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Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately. “This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“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.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Introduction

Matt 21:8-11 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matt 27:20-25 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!” Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!” So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

I. Background Teaching

Riding a donkey? 1 Kgs 1:32-34; Zech 9:9-10

Cloaks on the road? 2 Kgs 9:12b-13

“Hosanna?” הוֹשִׁיעָה in 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26; Psa 118:25?

Expectation: Political freedom? Acts 1:6

II. What's So Offensive to Them About Jesus?

1 Cor 1:18-25 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

III. What If Jesus Does Not Save Us in the Way We Want?

Excerpt from “Testament in the Furnace,” attributed to Jossel Rachower, an Austrian Jew who died in the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto after his wife and six children had already perished:

“And now my hour has come... Until my death I wish to speak live to my God, like a simple man, alive, who has the great but fatal privilege of being a Jew. I believe in the God of Israel, even if he has done everything to shatter my faith in him... I believe in his laws, even if I challenge the justification for his actions; I bow before his grandeur but I will not kiss the stick that beats me. I love him, but I love his law even more. I love his justice even more, Job and countless others would say today. And even if I were wrong about him, I would continue to adore his law. God signifies religion, but his law signifies the wisdom of life. You say we have sinned. Obviously we have sinned. That we should be punished for this, I accept as well. I would nevertheless like you to tell me if there is a sin on earth that deserves such a punishment as this. I tell you all this, my God, because I believe in you, because I believe more than ever in you, because I know now that you are my God, and not the God of those whose actions are the horrible fruit of their militant impiety. I cannot praise you for the acts that you tolerate, but I bless you and praise you for your majesty, which inspires awe. Your majesty must be really immense for all that is happening now not to make an impression on you... I am dying peacefully, but not satisfied; as a man who has been laid low, but not in despair; as a believer but not as a supplicant; loving God, but not a blind mumblor of Amen. I have followed God, even when he has pushed me far away from himself. I have fulfilled his commandment, even when in return for this observance he struck me. I have loved him. I was and am still taken with him, even when he has lowered me down to the ground, has tortured me to death but I will always believe in you: I will love you always, even in spite of yourself. And these are my final words, my God of anger: you will not succeed [in making me deny you]. You have done everything so that I should no longer believe in you, so that I might fall into doubt. But I die as I have lived, with an unshakable faith in you.”¹

¹ From Lytta Basset, *Holy Anger: Jacob, Job, Jesus* (London: Continuum, 2007), 94–95.

Dan 3:14-18 Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”