

Your King Comes

John 12:12-22

Call: Ps 148:1-4, 12-13 (NIV)

Scripture: John 12:12-15 (ESV)

I. Intro

Last spring for Palm Sunday, when we were meeting in the parking lot, we realized this might be the only time in history that we could actually bring in a live donkey for Palm Sunday! And, we did! For that particular Sunday, we had an observant visitor, visiting our church for the first time, ask this question, “So, your king rode a donkey?” That person got it. Yes he did! Our king rode a donkey. The king of kings rode a donkey when he entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.

Review

Today, we get to experience Palm Sunday in October. If you remember, last week we visited a dinner for Jesus put on by Mary, Martha and Lazarus the week before the Passover feast. In the middle of dinner, Mary poured a pound of pure nard on Jesus’ feet. She then wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair, a scandalous act for sure. But, she is so taken in love, devotion and gratitude for Jesus, she acts with abandon, ignoring the cultural standards of that time. It is an act of extravagant devotion.

Jesus, in turn, connects this act with his burial. Kings are anointed on their head, corpses on their feet. This prepares us to read the rest of John correctly. Jesus will be a different kind of king. His crown will be made of thorns. His throne will be a cross. And, his castle will be a tomb. That’s the lens that we, readers, now have entering Palm Sunday.

I invite you into our text, John 12, beginning in verse 12.

II. The Entrance (12-15)

12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

*15 “Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”*

A. The Crowds

So, now, the day after the dinner, Jesus rides into Jerusalem, what we call Palm Sunday. All four Gospels record this event, and all four take note of the large crowd which accompanies Jesus.

It's hard to overestimate the size of these crowds. It is believed that Jerusalem's population more than doubled during the three main feasts, from around 50,000 people to around 120,000 people. And, that meant the social dynamics of the city changed dramatically during the feasts. For one thing, the city could not hold that many people, so many people lived in huts outside the city walls. This happened not only for the Feast of Tabernacles, but for the three large feasts. But, also, the crowds notoriously brought tension into the city with which the leaders would have to deal.

B. The Entry

So, it would appear that those camping on the outskirts of the city join in with the crowd already accompanying Jesus. They accompany Jesus into the city in what has been called a "triumphal procession."

These processions were common in the ancient world. A conquering hero, surrounded by his army, would return to his city bringing the spoils of his conquests. His army would follow him, and behind them, all the new slaves in chains. Not here. No mention of army or slaves, just a large crowd. This is a different kind of king.

C. The Expectations

And this crowd enthusiastically ushers Jesus into the city, with specific actions and specific words. They lay palm branches on the road and shout, "*Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel.*" This is important because this tells us the great expectations the people have for Jesus. So, let's look at these actions and words.

1. First of all, the palm branches. For Palm Sunday, we typically get excited to watch our kiddos walk up to the front of the church and lay palm branches at a cross. And, yes, that is a fun tradition. However, palm branches in the first century were symbols of nationalism, a bit like flags in today's day and age.

In 141 BC, when Simon Maccabees drove out the Assyrians from Jerusalem, he's welcomed by the people waving palm branches. Later during both major Jewish wars with Rome, the Jews minted a new set of coins with palm branches on them. The crowd is waving palm branches as Jesus enters Jerusalem. Why? Because they are expecting Jesus to be a military leader. They are looking for him to crush the Romans and dominate the world.

How about the words?

2. The crowds begin by saying "*Hosanna.*" In our day, we use Hosanna as a word for praise or thanksgiving, but not in the 1st century. In the 1st century, it meant "save us" or "give salvation now." In other words, drive out the Roman bad guys and set us free.

Then they say, *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”* which is from Psalm 118 (verse 26). This psalm is sung at Passover, so it would be in the minds of all the people. But, it was originally sung to welcome in a victorious Davidic king. It’s a political announcement. It’s a way of saying, “Here he comes! The one who will drive out the bad guys and restore Jerusalem to political dominance in the world,” which is why they finish with, *“Even the king of Israel,”* words which are not in the Psalm.

It is clear that the crowds are expecting a national liberator, a warrior king. This is why at the end of the week, this same crowd can be crying “crucify him!” because he hasn’t met their expectations.

But, we already saw this back in chapter 6 of this Gospel. After Jesus fed the 5000, the crowd attempted to take him by force and make him king (John 6:14-15). Jesus was misunderstood then and is being misunderstood in this scene. And he will have none of it! He is a different kind of king. And he gives his expectation of kingship with his actions.

D. Jesus the King of Peace

John tells us that Jesus found a young donkey, sat on it and rode it into Jerusalem. Yes he did! Our king rode a donkey. And, by riding this donkey, Jesus *is* publicly claiming kingship.

Maybe a quick word here about kingship. Kingship has a rich history in Scripture. Kingship began with Abraham. Through Abraham, God promised that all families on earth would be blessed, but God also promised Abraham that kings would come from him (Gen 17). So, it is no surprise when kingship finally comes to Israel through Saul and David. The king is to be wise, to be for the people and to be anointed with God’s Spirit. God also promises David that an eternal king and an eternal kingdom will come through him. But, later in the prophets, the concept of kingship is modified significantly into the concept of Messiah, which simply means “anointed one.” Isaiah describes this future anointed one as coming from a virgin and being called Immanuel. Later in Isaiah, he seems to connect this coming anointed one with a suffering servant, who will give his life as an atonement for sin, but will be raised, lifted up and highly exalted (Is 52-53). By the time of Jesus, the concept of Messiah intensified, until there was much fervor surrounding the anointed one that would come.

As we see here, there were many different expectations for the coming Messiah king. In Jesus’ actions, his idea of kingship/Messiahship is very different from the crowds. As our insightful visitor asked back in April. “Your king rode a donkey?” In the ancient world, what kings rode on declared for everyone the purpose of their entrance. If they entered a city on a horse, they were entering it to conquer it. A king on a horse was entering for war. A king on a donkey was entering in peace. John understood this, because of the quote he gives from Zechariah 9:9. *“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”* Jesus *is* publicly claiming kingship by sitting on this colt, purposely fulfilling the Zechariah text.

John's quote does not perfectly match the text from Zechariah. John begins with "fear not"; Zechariah's began with "rejoice." It seems John wants to emphasize that this king is benevolent and for the people, and his reign is secure. There is no need to fear. This king comes in peace.

John does not quote the next verse of Zechariah, but I think it is implied. And, it clearly brings in the theme of peace. It says this:

*10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;*

The crowds are expecting a military deliverer, and John points out what is really happening. Israel, your king is coming, humble and riding a donkey's colt, and he will cut off *from you* all your weapons for war, your chariots and your war horses and your bows and arrows. In other words, the Romans aren't cut off. What is cut off is all of Israel's weapons of war! All of Israel's reliance on military might will be cut off when this king comes, for this king will bring peace. There is no need to fear.

This is why calling Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem "the triumphal entry" is a misnomer. This is not triumphal in the sense that he is conquering anything. This is the Prince of Peace entering on a donkey.

A few days later, on Good Friday, when Jesus is before Pilate, he asks Jesus, "*Are you a king? What have you done that they should deliver you up to me* (John 18:33-35)? Jesus replies, "*36 My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world*" (John 18:36). Jesus' kingdom is in this world, but it is not of it. His kingdom is not a kingdom made up of crushing the bad guys. His kingdom is actually made up of dying for the bad guys. It's a different kind of kingdom. His kingdom will bring light and life, not destruction and death. It's an upside-down kingdom. And Jesus is a different kind of king. Jesus is not a warrior king; he is a servant king. He won't encourage his followers to take up a sword. He'll encourage his followers to take up a cross, like him.

E. Come in Peace

Our king comes in peace, which means his followers are to come in peace as well. The church exists to demonstrate the rule and reign of our prince of peace. I wonder what it would look like for you and I to follow Jesus and come in peace to our homes, to our neighbors, to our classrooms, to our workplaces, to our sports fields. After all, you may be the only Jesus your family, your neighbors, your classmates, your colleagues and teammates ever see. Jesus will go on to bless the peacemakers, and Paul goes on to tell us, that as far as it depends on us, live at peace with all people (Matt 5:7, Rom 12:18).

So, what would it look like to come in peace in the midst of a fearful, panicky, and terrorized world? Perhaps it means I come in peace to my business meetings. Perhaps it means I don't

respond in revenge when someone cuts me off on the road. Perhaps it means I come in peace when I open up social media, and I don't respond in an antagonistic manner when I come to an opposing view. Perhaps it means I don't bully someone I disagree with, but instead offer compassion. Perhaps it's intentionally being more inclusive, not exclusive of people who look different than me. Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus says.

By the way, this is another reason for doing communion every Sunday this fall. Communion symbolizes the peace that God has brought to us, but it also nourishes us to be peacemakers throughout the week. Communion isn't just something we do. It forms us into a way of life that imitates our king, the prince of peace.

III. The Response (16-19)

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. 17 The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. 18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

A. The Misunderstanding

These verses provide a bit of a transition to the rest of the chapter. The disciples misunderstand just like the crowds. Although they do understand Jesus as the Messiah, they still can't put it all together. That is, until Jesus was glorified. When is Jesus glorified? In this Gospel, Jesus' great glorification is at the cross.

B. The Crowds

John goes on to say that many in the crowd continued to talk about Lazarus' being raised from the dead. King Jesus was growing in popularity especially because of his raising of Lazarus. Jerusalem was abuzz with intense emotion, although there are differing expectations all over the place. The social situation was changing, and the religious authorities would have to deal with it.

C. The Pharisees

The Pharisees then show their exasperation. They cannot figure out how to deal with the popularity of Jesus, and begin insulting each other. Like Caiaphas' prophecy in chapter 11 (11:49-53), they speak better than they know. The whole world is going after this man, and who shows up next? The Greeks, verse 20.

IV. The Greeks Arrive (20-22)

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. 21 So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

A. The Nations Come

What is interesting is that if you would have continued to read in Zechariah, the sons of Greece show up in verse 13. Ultimately those Greeks are saved by the Lord and brought into his flock. Here, our passage ends with some Greeks arriving. The whole world is going after this man! As Matthew records, Jesus drew the Magi when he was a baby. And, now near the end of his earthly life, Jesus draws Greeks as well. The nations are coming.

And, here, these Greeks find Philip, probably because Philip is a Greek name. And, they say these famous words, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

As I have said before, I don't think they are saying they want to simply catch a glimpse of Jesus. They are not asking to walk over to him & give him a COVID fist bump. When they ask to see Jesus, they are saying they want to understand who he is. They want to understand his character and what his mission is, what makes him tick. And, they want to know the best way to see him. When would be the best time to see his character, his mission and what he is all about?

B. Seeing Jesus

Isn't this what we all want? We all want to see Jesus. It's the same desire your family and classmates and workmates have every day. It's the same desire your teammates and teachers have every day. They want to see Jesus. And, so do we! It's why we are all here this morning isn't it? It's why we come to church. We don't come to see the preacher. We don't come to check a box. We make an effort to come on Sunday morning in order to see Jesus. And each Sunday, the leadership here desires to give you a picture of Jesus, to point you to Jesus.

C. Jesus' Response

And in response to The Greek's request, Jesus will give his last public speech to the world. It will be love's last appeal, the text we will look at in two weeks. What he will say is absolutely stunning and completely unexpected. What he says will be upside-down and inside-out. It will stun this crowd, as Jesus will answer exactly what the Greeks are wanting to see: who he is, what his mission is and how is the best way to see him?

Those are the questions that will frame the sermon next time. But, from today's text, we see that Jesus is the great king.

V. Implications

A. The Great King

Jesus is the great king! He is the king of kings and Lord of Lords, now enthroned on the throne of the universe. After his resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus said, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*" (Matt 28:18). Note well he says "all," not "some" authority. He says "all." *All* authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. It means there is not a realm of life anywhere in the universe over which Jesus Christ is not King. Abraham Kuyper said it this way, "There is not one centimeter of human existence to which Christ who is [king] and Lord of all does not point and say that is mine." This means he reigns

over all of science and art and culture, all neighborhoods and all nations and you and me. He is the great and true king of this world forever and ever. Now, as we said today, he is a different kind of king over a different kind of kingdom. And, his kingdom is now but not yet. It is a present reality now, but not completely here now. Scripture is clear that he is coming again to set everything right.

B. How the Great King Reigns

But, how does he rule and reign right now in this in-between time before he comes again to set everything right? He rules and reigns through us! He rules and reigns by inviting us to submit our lives to his kingly authority. He rules and reigns by each one of us surrendering to his authority in all areas of our lives. That of course means that nothing else holds ultimate authority in my life. I am a follower of Jesus first. Social media doesn't hold ultimate authority in my life. My political leanings do not hold ultimate authority in my life. The culture does not hold ultimate authority in my life. He, the great king, does. "There is not one centimeter of *my* existence to which Christ who is king and Lord of all does not point and say that is mine."

I grew up with the idea that there were sacred areas of my life where Jesus was king, and there were secular areas of my life where I was king. This is a false view of life. Jesus is king over all of life. Of course this means that all of life is sacred because Jesus is king over all of it.

When I was working with the young adults, I did a series with them called "Jesus is Lord," and each week we talked about what it would mean for him to rule and reign as king and Lord over different areas in my life. Among other things, we talked about surrendering to his authority in the area of technology. We talked about surrendering to his authority in the area of sexuality. We talked about surrendering to his authority in the care of creation. We talked about surrendering to his authority in the area of social justice. We talked about trusting each area to what He says in Scripture and not leaning on my own understanding.

All authority has been given to him, so I intentionally surrender to his authority over all of my life. I surrender to what He says is good, right and true. I live by His values and his priorities, remembering his kingdom is upside-down from everything around me. And the hope is that people will look at my life under his kingship and say, "I like it. I'm in too!" After all, they want to see Jesus, so show them Jesus!

C. Fear not!

So, go without fear and with great courage to live this upside-down kingdom in your life. It's not easy because nothing in our culture encourages us to live this upside-down life. So, go in the power of his Spirit to live the values of this kingdom even though everything around us rejects Him and His values. He has all authority, and he will have the last word. He is king of kings and Lord of lords.

Amen.

Benediction

Receive this benediction from Revelation 1:

Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:4-5).

And, may Jesus make His rule and reign known through your life this week.