

## Introduction

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.

### Zechariah 9.9

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.

### Zechariah 14.4

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!  
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

### Psalm 118.25-26

Palm Sunday is a significant day, as it marks Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week in which Jesus will be arrested, tried, sentenced, and executed on a cross.

Palm Sunday is also a significant day for me, as last year on Palm Sunday I preached my first sermon here at First Presbyterian Church. That was a special day. While I'll always remember that on future Palm Sundays, it can't take away from how special this event was in the story of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. In fact, I intentionally call Jesus Lord and Savior because this story demonstrates that the crowds in the Palm Sunday story began seeing that Jesus was a Lord or a King, and that Jesus was a savior.

## **Context**

But before we get to how the crowds see Jesus, let's get some context. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, except for a quick snippet in Luke when Jesus is a child, there is no mention of Jesus visiting Jerusalem. All his ministry has been wandering around a region north of Jerusalem called Galilee. Several weeks ago, we talked about how Jesus had turned his attention to Jerusalem, when he began telling his disciples he had to go there to die and be raised from death. Jerusalem was, and still is, the big city. It would be like Jesus doing most of his ministry and teaching in Maine, and sometimes dipping into Vermont and New Hampshire, and then telling his disciples, alright, time to go to Boston.

Jesus does not just choose Jerusalem at any old time though, Jesus and his disciples are going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Jerusalem was the place to be during the Passover, the city would have been busting at the seams with people from

all over Israel and maybe even beyond. So, it would be like Jesus doing most of his ministry and teaching in Maine, saying, Time to go to Boston, and he chooses Marathon Monday to do it. Back to Jerusalem, it would have seemed like the whole world showed up to celebrate Passover.

Jesus is standing on the Mount of Olives, looking across the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem. From this vantage point, he and his disciples would have seen the Temple well, where Jesus would teach and flip tables during the week. I'll show you a photo from my trip in 2014 to Israel. It would have been as if Maine Jesus took one last stop on Bunker Hill, looking out at downtown Boston, before crossing the Charles. Okay, I'll stop with New England Jesus metaphors, I just want you all to know that I've learned a little about our geography.

He tells two of his disciples to go get a donkey, and if the owner has a problem, just tell them "The Lord needs it." Side note: I don't think Jesus would appreciate you trying this without being explicitly told to say it.

The two disciples do so, and this is where Matthew begins to show us that what's going on here is more than meets the eye, as Jesus is fulfilling prophecy from Zechariah. This is indeed the Messiah that God had promised.

## **King: Entrance**

As I said earlier, the way the crowds react to Jesus shows us that they consider him a king and a savior. Here's how we know that.

We know the crowds think Jesus is a king because they left the city to greet him and laid down branches and cloaks in an ancient roll-out-the-red-carpet kind of way. This was done for kings and royal dignitaries, especially when they arrived home from battle on horses. You would leave the city gate and welcome them back into the city.

But this king is different. He rides on a donkey instead of a horse. Now, back in Jesus' day, horses were used for one purpose only: war. They were not yet used for agriculture or travel, they were war animals. Donkeys and oxen were used for agriculture and travel. So Jesus is not a conquering king in the traditional violent ways. Jesus is a king who conquers sin and death, yes, but he does so not as a King of Conquest, but as the Prince of Peace. Riding on a donkey. Entering the city where he will paradoxically conquer death by dying.

## **Savior: Hosanna**

We know the crowds think Jesus is a savior because of what they say. They use this word, Hosanna. Do you know what Hosanna means? Hosanna is a great word. There are so many songs with it, including the one we sang earlier. When I worked in youth ministry at a large church in LA, there was a praise band made up

of students and led by the church's worship leader, Ben. There were two services, one for middle schoolers and one for high schoolers. I worked with the high school group, so I only hear this story, but once during the middle school service, after singing a song titled Hosanna, the worship leader said, "I really love that song, and that word Hosanna is so important. Hosanna means, um, uh...well I don't know what it means...Jim? Jim was the middle school pastor. He shrugged. They didn't know, and the service went on. They googled the term between services, so Ben knew it by the time we had the high school service. So what does it mean?

We don't need to know a special language to know it, we just need to look at the psalm Matthew quotes here.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" They are quoting Psalm 118, which was our Old Testament reading. "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord." Hosanna is two Hebrew words put together, *hoshiah nah*, and these words appear in Psalm 118:25, "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!" If we plugged in our word, Hosanna, it Psalm 118:25 would read, "Hosanna, O Lord!" Hosanna means, Save us, we beseech you. Please, Lord, save us.

This is even more significant when we remember that the context here is that everyone is gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, the greatest festival to celebrate God's salvation of the Hebrews from slavery. Here, with Passover on their minds, they are crying out to God's messiah for the same salvation. Salvation from oppression. Both the temporal oppression of Rome and the timeless oppression of sin and death. We need salvation. We need a savior. Could this king, riding in on a donkey, be the savior?

### **Us - Where and when does Jesus enter?**

When we look at how this story touches our lives today, I want to first pause and tell you that just this story at face value in the midst of the narrative of Jesus' life is so significant for us today. It marked the beginning of the end; the beginning of the end of Jesus' life and ministry on earth, yes, but also the beginning of the end of the hold that sin and death has on us. The beginning of the end of waiting for a savior. It's truly a wonderful story.

But I do wonder how Jesus' entrance on Palm Sunday can speak into each of our lives. I wonder how Jesus enters into our lives and if that entrance is like this one. I wonder if we can also recognize that Jesus is Lord and Savior as the crowds did.

Like Jerusalem, I wonder if Jesus shows up in our lives at the exact right time. Perhaps we've had too much on our plates for too long, that if our lives were a city it would feel like Jerusalem during Passover week. When Jesus enters our lives at such a

time, pay attention. When our lives are busiest, we will both need Jesus more and be more distracted by other things when Jesus enters. Pay attention.

And when we pay attention to Jesus entering our lives, we are also called to recognize him as Lord and Savior. As Lord he deserves our recognition and obedience. As Savior, he deserves our praise and thanksgiving. As Lord, he shows us the way to live. As Savior, he frees us to live that way. Where in your life today do you need the guidance of the Lord? Where in your life today do you need to be saved? Maybe it's something you did or something that happened to you in the past that haunts you. Maybe it's an addiction. Maybe it's reconciliation in a relationship. Maybe its rest from too much work and stress. We need a savior. And when we need a savior, one rides up to us humbly on a donkey. Will we cry out, "Hosanna! Save us!"? Lent is a time of year where we recognize our need for a savior, for salvation; next Sunday, at Easter, we realize that Jesus is indeed that savior, through death and resurrection, Jesus provides that salvation.

With this all in mind, we'll now practice our final Lenten Spiritual Discipline together. It is called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for holy reading. It can be done in many ways, but the practice always involves listening to one passage of Scripture several times and giving a reflective, quiet time in between readings to meditate. This can help us do a few things, and it could be different for each person. Lectio can help us visualize a passage, such as Jesus entering Jerusalem, and it can also help us

concentrate on important words or phrases that we may miss if we only read it once.

### **Practicing *Lectio***

When I read the first time, I want you to find a word or phrase that catches your ear.

Read Matthew 21:8-11

When I read it a second time, and I arrive at your word or phrase, use the time after to think about why that word or phrase stood out.

I also want you to visualize this scene, what does the scene look like? What do you hear?

Read Matthew 21:8-11

When I read it a third a final time, think of how this word of phrase may be speaking into your life today. And visualize how this scene of Jesus entering Jerusalem can translate into Jesus entering your life today.

Read Matthew 21:8-11