

Palm Sunday
What Kind of King?
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Text: Matthew 21:1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

NOTES

Throughout Lent, we have been reflecting on Matthew 11:28-30. This is an important text for West Valley because our mission is to “Know Christ, and make Christ known.” Who is Jesus Christ as we have experienced him? What is the character of Christ that we have known, and want to embody in our ministry so others may know him too?

Here again is Jesus’ invitation:

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

When Jesus invites us to take his yoke, he is inviting us to submit to his authority as having the last word in our lives. He is asking us to receive him as the boss, the master, the king. But what kind of king will he be?

He enters Jerusalem, along with the throngs of other people, as a pilgrim. The population has swelled as pious people have come great distances to celebrate Passover in the holy city. All the pilgrims would have passed the time on their long journey by singing a set of songs from their hymnal, the Psalms. Psalms 113-118 were often sung at Passover. Near the Psalm 118, these are the verses they would have sung:

25 O LORD, save us;

O LORD, grant us success.

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

27 The LORD is God,

and he has made his light shine upon us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession

up to the horns of the altar.

Those who had heard of Jesus' words and deeds from far off Galilee might well have had these verses in mind when they welcomed him into the city with shouts of, "Hosanna!" "O Save!"

When the occupying Romans entered Jerusalem, it was in a triumphal procession. The point was to demonstrate power and military superiority. Caesar in Rome could claim kingship through threat of violence. Indeed, when the pilgrims entered Jerusalem they would see the remains of would-be messiahs – those who had wanted to overthrow Rome in violent rebellion – hanging on crosses. That is what happened to those who tried to fight the system.

By entering Jerusalem as he does, Jesus isn't just participating in some political theater to let people know he is "a man OF the people." He is demonstrating that he is the Messiah – "the anointed one" – who is FOR the people. He is revealing himself as the kind of Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. He enters Jerusalem embodying compassion.

The word "compassion" means "to suffer with." Jesus is the one who is fully acquainted with all our sufferings, because he has experienced them all. Jesus Christ is the compassionate one we know, and the compassionate Lord we want to make known in our community.

This really became evident for me when I listened to people's stories about the Teddy Bear Fair. What people remember best about previous fairs is the how much it means to kids to have their beloved teddy bear fixed, or to get to adopt a bear and make it part of their family. People remember the looks of gratitude on the kids' faces, and on the faces of their parents as well! This small act of compassion goes a long way in a person's life.

As we pray and prepare for this year's Teddy Bear Fair, let's ask God to give us new eyes to see how the folks who come longing for compassion. Let's ask God to bring lots people who are in special need of His compassionate care, so we can pray for them. Let's ask for God's help to not simply do the many tasks that need to be done that day, but also to make time to hear people's stories, to be curious about their lives and the real challenges they face, so that we can not only provide a little bit of fun but also be a source of compassionate love.

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