

The Return of the King – Matthew 21:1-11

Introduction: I read a story about a plainly dressed man who went into a church in the Netherlands one Sunday and took a seat near the pulpit. Soon, a woman came along and curtly told the man that he was sitting in her seat. She then asked him to leave that seat. The man apologized and moved away to a pew reserved for the poor. From that place, he gladly took part in the service.

When the service ended, a friend of the woman came over and asked her if she knew whom she had ordered out of her seat. The woman replied casually that she did not know who it was and really did not care. Can you imagine her shock, dismay and embarrassment when she was informed, “It was King Oscar of Sweden!” (Taken from a men’s devotional)

Palm Sunday ... the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a king. The day the Jewish nation had anticipated for hundreds of years. Every prophet who wrote, every priest who taught, every teacher who primed his students told of the coming of a king, one like David of old who would rescue the people from their enemies. When Babylon conquered Israel, they looked for a king to rescue them; then came the Assyrians, the Greeks and now the Romans. Always the people cried out, “How long O Lord?”

Then came that wonderful day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. It was almost time for the feast of Passover, the festival to celebrate God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and the crowds were hoping that God would send another deliverer to free them from oppression and foreign rulers. They were looking for a king, that day.

To make sure the people knew what was happening, Jesus very intentionally orchestrated the events. He arranged for a donkey – actually, the foal of a donkey, which meant it had not been ridden by anyone else. He was making it as plain as possible that he was the king foretold by the prophet Zechariah:

Say to Daughter Zion,
See, your king comes to you,
Gentle and riding on a donkey,
And on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Despite all the waiting, and pining for a king, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem the people were not willing to accept him as their king. Oh yes, there was a great crowd to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem. There were shouts of joy, and people called out “Hosanna!” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Even the children got into the act, which caused Jesus to smile. It was a great celebration, a great party, but it was no coronation.

Jesus was not fooled by the hype. He knew the hearts of people, and knew they were more interested in miracles and free bread than making him king of their lives. Jesus was not the kind of king they wanted – they wanted a military man, a conquering hero. Jesus was just...

What do they call him in verse 11? “The prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” The nobody.

It is in Luke’s Gospel that we read it was on the journey into the city that Jesus pauses and weeps for the city, saying, “If you, even you, had only known on his day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes... you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:42, 44)

Here is the most important part of that day: Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a king, but not just any king. This was the one true king of Israel. Who was the true king of Israel? God. He always was, and will always be the true king.

Listen again to the words of the Psalmist, King David who sang this song 1000 years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem:

⁹ Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:9-10)

Jesus is the king of glory – for Jesus is God. He is the rightful king not only of Israel, but of all people. Presidents, and Prime Ministers, Chancellors and Princes, yes, even earthly Kings and Queens will one day bow before Jesus and declare that “Jesus is Lord: Jesus is God.”

But that day, so long ago, the people looked for the wrong type of king. The General Superintendents sent out a note to encourage pastors this week, and this is what they wrote about Palm Sunday:

“They wanted a king who would overcome their oppression with a strong hand. They wanted someone to take charge and take over. They could only see what they *wanted* and not what they *needed*. In fact, Jesus knew that the king they wanted would never be the kind of king they needed. Their remedy could not be their cure. They chose earthly power over divine love. This caused Jesus to weep over the city.”

The challenge of our General Superintendents was simply this – may we not do that again today. In the midst of COVID-19 with all its disruptions and suffering, people are still holding out for the cure medicine might bring, or an antiviral to rescue the sick or vulnerable. How many have thought to seek the help of the King: King Jesus?

Rev. Bill Bahan, retired pastor and friend to many, wrote a note of encouragement that was passed to me this week by Cathy Fee. In it he quoted Philippians 4:17 from the New Living Translation of the Bible:

“Don’t worry about anything, instead, pray about everything.
Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.
Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.
His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

Let’s go back to the first Palm Sunday. Jesus road into Jerusalem with a purpose. He was declaring what kind of king he would be. Yes, he was God, and all power and authority was his. He could have brought the walls of Jerusalem down with a word, destroyed all the Roman soldiers in the city with a sweep of his hand, and silenced the oppression of the law bound religious establishment with simply a nod of his head ... but that is not the kind of king Jesus is.

Jesus was riding into Jerusalem to set in motion what he knew would be the climax of his earthly ministry. The king was declaring war – but not on people, but on sin and Satan. He was serving the oppressor notice that the gantlet was thrown down and he was ready to do battle. By week’s end, the showdown would take place – King Jesus vs. Satan.

By Friday night, just five days from this triumphant ride into Jerusalem, Jesus would fulfill yet another scripture. He would be betrayed by one of his disciples, arrested, falsely tried and condemned to die. He would be beaten, mocked and nailed to a cruel Roman cross, and on a lonely hill outside the city, King Jesus would die. And Isaiah 53 was fulfilled:

- ³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
- ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him

the iniquity of us all. ¹

“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him...”

Jesus rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday on a donkey, the symbol of a peaceful king. He would ride a horse if he came for battle or to prove his might. But Jesus chose a donkey to announce he was bringing peace – for those who would receive it. Peace with God, and the peace a person experiences when they know their sins are forgiven by God. This is what Jesus was offering that day.

Sadly, few would receive that peace Jesus offered. By week’s end the people of Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus with shouts of “Hosanna” on Sunday would be shouting a different chant. This time they would call out, “Crucify Him.” Listen to Mark’s account (15:12-15)

¹² “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

¹³ “Crucify him!” they shouted.

¹⁴ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. ²

This is no way to treat a king. This is no way to treat the King of Kings, Jesus Christ our Lord. But Jesus knew this was coming, and it was for this very reason he rode into Jerusalem. He came to give his life to save us from our sin and give us eternal life.

So today Jesus still comes into our city, and he is still the one true king – yes, he is God. He comes with an offer to all of us: confess we are sinners, repent or turn away from that old life of sin, and receive Jesus into your life and we will be born again into eternal life. Jesus still comes to us as the prince of peace, and he says, “peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”

Again quoting from our General Superintendent’s letter:

¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Is 53:3–6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mk 15:12–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Prince of Peace still comes into our cities, towns, and villages; He enters our churches and courthouses, our hospitals and homes. Moreover, He is riding on a donkey, bringing peace, comfort, and hope. The healing of the world will be accomplished through the triumph of Christ by the power of God's love. And of His reign, there will be no end.

As Jesus comes into our city, to your home, let today be the day of salvation – let today be the day you receive Jesus as your personal saviour. Today you can be born again by turning from sin and receiving the forgiveness and presence of Jesus into your life. As the king comes to Nanaimo, do not miss your opportunity to bow before him, and yield your allegiance to him and him alone.

Why this is so important is picked up in the title of this message: the return of the king. You see, the same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem 2000 years ago on a donkey will come again, but this time he rides a horse – he comes in victory and judgement. Hear the words of God found in Revelation 19: 11-16:

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."¹⁶ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Scripture tells us there will be signs to point to the nearness of his coming: earthquakes, plagues of locust, famine, economic ruin, fear among the peoples, pestilence. Any of this sound familiar?

Each sign shouts out to us – be ready – the king returns! This Palm Sunday it is good to look back to the arrival of King Jesus in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. But today we also must look forward knowing that the king is coming. Are we ready? Are we doing all we can to help others be ready? I beg you, if you have never asked Jesus to forgive your sin and come into your life, if you do not know what it is to be born again, seek Jesus today. Don't delay.

Hosanna, the crowds sang. It means, "Save us." Yes, Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!