

“Getting Ready!”

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Matthew 21:1-11*

It was Palm Sunday, but the five year old Johnny had to stay home from church because he was sick. When the family returned home carrying palm branches, he asked what they were for. His mother explained, “People held them over Jesus’ head as he walked by.” “Wouldn’t you know it,” Johnny said, “The one Sunday I don’t go, Jesus shows up!”

I hope Jesus shows up in your hearts this morning, as we once again get ready for the pivotal day – of Christianity – Easter!

But as we are getting ready, through Lent and now Palm/Passion Sunday, the implication is – not yet! We’re getting ready for Jesus to show up – on Resurrection – Easter Sunday – but not yet!

Once again the children have reenacted the wondrous and joyous entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus and his followers were going there for the Jewish Passover. They were devout Jews, adhering to their tradition of going to the Temple during the most sacred of days.

Our children did a great job processing with our beloved donkey, (who never seems to age) waving palms and cheering!

This is Palm Sunday! The beginning of Holy Week for the Christian church. This event sets in motion the last week of Jesus’ life on earth. It was time for a parade!

But, on our church calendars, this is not only Palm Sunday, but it is Passion Sunday. Passion and Parade are woven into the Christian story. Both are there. Both speak to our lives

As the children have shown us, Jesus enters Jerusalem, with palms waving. He enters the “City of Peace.” How hopeful humans have been, and continue to be. Imagine calling this city, a city of peace! What hope! What Chutzpah!

Jesus was entering a city, a place where there was no peace. His own people were under the control, thumb of Roman oppressors. These invaders allowed a degree of civic order for the Jews. But, if you stepped out of line—crucifixion was a declaration and a cross away. Jesus was entering a city that so wanted freedom to live and to express themselves within their own government. Families, mothers, fathers children, carried within their hearts, the hope that life could be different.

They hoped . . .

- ❖ They did not need to live as unfulfilled people.
- ❖ They did not need to live in fear.
- ❖ They did not need to exist with the chains of social, individual, spiritual bondage locked around their necks.

Secretly, they were looking and hoping. Secretly because, any “stirrings” of such visions in public, would be experienced with retaliation and harsh punishment by the powers that be. So many dads, moms, grandparents, friends, and neighbors had been living secret lives of desperation, with a flicker of hope that all could change. They were getting ready for their lives to be different, fulfilled, hope-filled!

Really deep down, within so many hearts, was the desire, “Oh God, may things be different?” But, this prayer was normally whispered practically inaudible for fear that the wrong ears would hear. Life wasn't what they expected it would be. Their dreams, if they could still recall them, had either turned to nightmares, or just receded into the void of the daily drudge of existence.

And Jesus gets ready to enter Jerusalem!

But many, many more were still secretly hoping. Some would get together in the evenings, at the homes of trusted friends. They would share in a meager meal, but all would be served. The wicks of the oil lamp would flicker about them as they gathered close to one another, with lowered voices, recalling the stories of their fathers and mothers of how life could be different. Once in a while one of them would forget himself and call out “The Messiah will come! Our lives will be different!” Seeing the fear on his neighbors’ faces, he would lower his voice once again, and they would pause anxiously to listen for anyone at the door. And so it would go in the City of Peace!

Day after day, night after night, month after month, year after year.

In some ways, not too much has changed, over the last two thousand years. We often neglect history but to our peril. Who cannot help but consider Jerusalem—the Middle East today? City of Peace? “What a joke!” But still a hope!

And Jesus gets ready to enter Jerusalem.

And what about ourselves? Here in the United States, we are living in a “new normalcy” since September 11th. We are still trying to define what normal is for us. We are struggling with what to think of Islam. A week doesn't go by, where an op-ed piece in some major newspaper isn't about Islam, Islamic terrorists, or Muslim positions in various Arab countries.

Some may grow weary, but vigilance, study, knowledge, and resolve are orders of the day. Our own neatly packed and comfortable world has been exposed and shaken. We are anxious more so than most of us express. We are worried about a world out of control—our world—the world of our children – from terrorism to economic malaise.

And Jesus gets ready to enter Jerusalem.

We want to live in the city of Peace, the place of Peace, but it seems so far off. We are looking for a safe place, for our children, families, our country, ourselves.

Jesus and his followers arrive at Bethpage, right outside of Jerusalem. They travel to the Mount of Olives, which is on a hill above Jerusalem proper. Jesus orders two of his followers to go to a nearby village and get a donkey and its colt, and bring them to him (there are textual issues here. But that's for you scholars, at a later time). Jesus goes on to say, "if anyone questions you about your actions of taking the animals, tell them, 'The Lord has need of them.'" Sure enough, according to the story, the animals are found and brought to Jesus. All is going according to plan.

Matthew then throws in a scripture from the past, Zechariah 9:9. Jesus is expressing his connection with the past. Something new may be taking place, but not within a vacuum. Don't be too anxious to throw away and to discard the past, for life has been done before, and there is much to learn!

But, why could he not have chosen a better text for his entry into the City of Peace? Really? "Behold your King is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey." There must be other texts where hearty steeds, beautiful stallions were the fare of the day—surely! Instead, a donkey. Think about it. When one of our children rides the donkey down the aisle, we smile and get warm fuzzes. "Oh, that's so cute!" What if I was the one riding our donkey? (Now try to get that image out of your head).

This donkey is telling us something. Not all is about outward power and strength. Not all is just for show. Power and strength come in many sizes and disguises! Don't underestimate your capacities. A fellow riding on a donkey is not necessarily to be dismissed.

The time has arrived to begin the parade. All is in order. The silent crowds have decided to take a chance and break their silence. They were able to get beyond their fear, at least for a time! Out of joy, respect and hope many place some of their clothes on the animal for Jesus to sit on. The clothing was probably not Hugo Boss, Armani, Gucci or Versace. But what they had, they used.

These people were bursting at the seams! They were actually getting ready!! They perceived a glimmer of hope, in their almost hopeless world. They were remembering all those stories, recounted over and over again and again when huddled in their homes, as night fell around them. They had enough of their secret longings. Today, in broad daylight, they were going to celebrate, and yell at the top of their lungs that hope was within reach, peace was within reach. Their lives would have meaning!

Hosanna!

Hosanna!

Hosanna to the Son of David!

There is that memory of the past again! "Son of David." There he is, there he goes—Jesus riding on a donkey entering the City of Peace. Crowds—heart-sick, hopeful people yelling at the top of their voices (forgetting decorum).

Hope is possible!

Hope is alive!

Haven't there been times in your life, when you had to break free of your secret fears and just let it flow, whether tears, laughter, or words? Is it time to let go of your anxiety and enter the parade? Isn't it time to get ready for the change of your life?! For vision! For Hope!

And Jesus enters Jerusalem!

Jesus caused quite a stir, even riding on a donkey. The city of peace was buzzing, "Who is this?"

We need to parade around – getting ready for a way of life that makes all the difference!

We need a reminder that life matters.

- ❖ That you matter.
- ❖ That the world matters.

Yes, the Passion is up ahead including rough times!! But, (sshhhhh . . .) Easter Sunday morning is around the corner!

Amen.

