

Palm/Passion Sunday, March 16, 2008, 2nd Baptist Church – Lincoln, NE;
Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

The Two Entries into Jerusalem

Jesus' entry in to Jerusalem, Mark 11:1-11 (NIV):

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!" (Save)

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Psalm 118:15-26)

"Hosanna in the highest!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV):

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

In our churches we celebrate Palm Sunday by having children bring in palm branches, waving them as they walk down the aisle and singing Hosanna. We are praising God and proclaiming a triumphal entry. During this past week we mourned the death of Joyce Andersen and Carol Shurtliff. Joyce and her husband Dewey, and their family, were well known to members of Second Baptist. Carol was a blind woman who faithfully attended the Special Class sponsored by Eastland Industries that meets in our church. I like to think that those who have fallen asleep in Jesus had their triumphant entry into heaven just a few days before the celebration of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday, is the beginning of Holy Week. I am grateful for the writings of John Dominic Crosson and Marcus J. Borg in a book called, The Last Week. I highly recommend it to you for these two authors go into detail on the daily experiences of Jesus during this most important week of the Christian year. In some places they give the account hour by hour. To those critics who challenge whether or not the events of Holy Week ever happened, they simply reply that that is not the issue. The issue is: what do these things mean?

I'll return to their book a little later.

I. Lets look at the gospel account:

First is the procurement of the colt. Jesus pre-arranged for the donkey and the colt. He sends two of his disciples with a password in case they are questioned. They are to say, "The Lord has need of it." Sure enough they are questioned and they give the password. It is rather strange that Jesus would refer to himself as Lord because he never does that elsewhere. The word that is translated Lord could, and perhaps should, be translated as God; say, "God has need of it." The intention is to indicate that the donkey and the colt are to be used for a sacred purpose. Usually a colt will go with its mother but not by itself. It is not that Jesus rode two animals at the same time. That is why the text insists it is a colt that has never been ridden. As we understand it though, it is the Lord (meaning Jesus) that needs it. Either way it is interpreted the colt and the donkey are going to be used for a sacred purpose.

They bring the donkey and the colt to Jesus and people spread their cloaks for him to ride. Others spread their cloaks on the ground; others get branches out of the nearby fields. John is the only gospel that records using palm branches. It is sort of like a red carpet treatment except that their cloaks are probably not red.

When we use the word Hosanna we use it as a praise word, more like Praise the Lord. The Hebrew meaning of the word means simply, "Save." It is the same word used in Psalm 118:25 which say, "Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord!" So the people shouting were really saying, "Save us, Jesus; save us!" Save from what? Save from the Roman occupation, save from the hard times they are going through, save from whatever they needed saving; maybe they even meant, "Save the city of Jerusalem!"

Jesus knows what they mean and he quietly lets them say it. In a few days they will be saying, "Crucify him!" It is rather a motley crowd along with the disciples. They don't really know who Jesus is—yet!

In some of the gospels Jesus goes into the Temple and cleanses it. Mark places this cleansing at a later time.

In Mark the entry into Jerusalem is not all that triumphant! The Interpretation Bible Commentary says that the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem "was on such a small scale that it failed to attract public attention." (p. 238, *ibid.*) If it had been on a larger scale of a large number of people publicly acclaiming Jesus as their king the Roman garrison would have promptly cooled that messianic ardor. (p. 237, *In loc cit.*)

Those remarks lead to what I want to say next about another entry into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday. In this book that I previously mentioned, The Last Week, another entry into Jerusalem that day is mentioned. It is on the other side of the city of Jerusalem.

II. Lets look at the Roman history of that day:

The Romans conquered that part of the world in 63 B.C. Herod the Great was appointed king over that area in 40 B.C. and ruled until 4 B.C. His kingship depended upon keeping the peace. As most kings were he was anxious to improve his area so he built palaces and cities. He built a magnificent marina on the Mediterranean Sea as well as a palace at Caesarea. To placate the Jews over which he ruled he began rebuilding the Temple which was not completed until 64 A.D. In 70 A.D. that same temple that he built was destroyed by the very government that made him a king.

The way the Romans ruled was to put local government in charge of the day to day operation but then they would exact a tribute from that government. For Jerusalem and Judea they allowed the religious authorities, the Pharisees and others, to be the ruling class. If things got too out of hand they would take that authority away from them and give it to others. That is why Caiaphas and the Temple leaders were so anxious that there would be no uprisings in their Temple and in Jerusalem. They would bend over backwards to please the Roman powers that be. They would ask the Roman authorities to help them keep the peace which they did.

Herod the Great ruled with an iron hand and he kept the peace. His successors desired to keep the peace as well. So, Pontius Pilate is now charged with keeping the peace in the territory that he governs. He spends much of his time in Caesarea where there is a fine palace and ocean breezes from the Mediterranean Sea. He would rather be there than in Jerusalem but he knows that he has a job to do and, in order to keep his job, he must insure order in his province. One of the hot spots is always Jerusalem where many faithful Jews resent the Roman rule. So, when there are Jewish holy days he makes the trip to keep the peace. This is always one of those times. He comes into Jerusalem on the opposite side that Jesus comes. He is riding a fine horse and his main leaders are also riding fine horses. They are dressed in their armor, carrying shields, swords, and spears. The sun glistens on their military weaponry. There are foot soldiers marching along, dressed in their required military finery and carrying their weapons. There are many of them. They present quite a spectacle as they come into Jerusalem. It is a demonstration of military might. It looks like a planned political demonstration. This is quite a contrast compared to the entrance on the other side of Jerusalem featuring Jesus and his disciples.

Here is how it reads in The Last Week, page 4 and 5: "Jesus procession deliberately countered what was happening on the other side of the city. Pilate's procession embodied the power, glory, and violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus' procession embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God. This contrast—between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar—is central...to the story of Jesus and early Christianity.

The confrontation between these two kingdoms continues throughout the last week of Jesus' life. The week ends with Jesus' execution by the powers who ruled the world. Holy Week is the story of this confrontation."

Now if you were in Jerusalem that day, which entry would you have been watching; which parade would you have gone to? I expect that the important leaders of Jerusalem would have been watching Pontius Pilate.

Isn't that what official's do, go to parades that will help them keep their positions or help them get a position? It wouldn't hurt to have Pontius Pilate notice you if you wanted status in Jerusalem.

So, the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem that day is saying, "Save us from the kind of oppression that is coming in from the other side of the city. Save us now!" And the disciples who have said that Jesus is the Christ just a few days before seem like they know a secret others don't. They are thinking, "Yes! God is going to come with his mighty forces and demonstrate his power and then these people will really believe!"

"Two processions entered Jerusalem on that day. The same question, the same alternative, faces those who would be faithful to Jesus today. Which procession are we in? Which procession do we want to be in? This is the question of Palm Sunday and of the week that is about to unfold." (Page 30)