

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Dee McIntosh
Jesus' Triumphal Entry**

My name is Dee McIntosh. I'm the local Missions Pastor here at CPC and it is glorious to be with you all on this slightly cold morning in March. We are entering into Holy Week, and today we celebrate Palm Sunday. It's amazing to see all the kids walk down with the palms following the donkey, and it reminds us of the fact that this is the Sunday where we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Now, just for a little context on what is going on and why we celebrate Palm Sunday: Jesus, in His three years of ministry, spent a lot of time going to various villages around the area of Jerusalem, proclaiming a message of the Kingdom of God. He performed signs, miracles, and wonders, He healed blind Bartimaeus, and best of all He turned water into wine. And He spent these three years with his twelve disciples, every single day, loving on them, empowering them, discipling them, raising them up to be the eventual church fathers of Christianity. And then Jesus does something that the disciples are not anticipating. The closer and closer they get to Jerusalem, He begins to talk about His death. And He says things like, "The Son of Man must die," and they're surprised by this.

So we will pick up immediately in the text of Matthew 21. If you have your Bibles or smartphones, pull them out. We will begin in Matthew 21, verse 1:

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying 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. ³If anyone says anything to you, say 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 Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The 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 heaven!" ¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." [Matthew 21:1-11]

Now I thought to begin I would contextualize this a little bit, modernize this request that Jesus makes to the disciples, because it *is* an odd request. So I'm going to use someone in the crowd...we're going to use Keith up there, Keith Downey. You have such a biblical name by the way—Matheus, Jonas, Petros, Keith—it's great. So, I want you to pretend that you are one of the disciples and you have just traveled around the southwest metro...you've been to Chaska and Chanhassen and Eden Prairie, and Jesus says to you, "I need you to go to Christ

Presbyterian Church, and when you get there, you're going to see this car [*picture shown*]. It's blue, it's a BMW, it's a convertible, it's gorgeous...and I just want you to take it." That's literally what Jesus told the disciples, "Just take it, and if the owner [*who happens to be our senior pastor, John Crosby*] asks you why you want his car, you simply say, 'The Lord needs it'" I dare anyone to try that this week, just go to John and say, "You know what? The Lord needs your car." By the look on his face, you might not get it.

It's an odd request, and yet the disciples do it. They go to the town, they take the donkey, and the owner gives it to them. And when they bring the donkey to Jesus, they lay their outer cloaks, their jackets, on the donkey and Jesus gets on it. And as He rides the donkey into the city, a massive crowd of people begins to take off their outer garments and lay them down before the Lord as a kind of red carpet. Others cut down palm branches and they lay them down alongside the outer garments so that every step the donkey takes is on this red carpet. And if you look in your Bibles, whether in the book of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, every single one of them accounts this story as the triumphal entry of Jesus.

Have you ever asked yourself what is triumphal about this? I mean, it's not like Jesus is entering the city in a Maybach or a Tesla or a BMW...he's on a donkey. And if any of you who are sitting in this row here, this aisle, got a small whiff of the donkey as he was going into the Great Room...they smell! The savior of the universe is on a donkey, and this is triumphal. It's curious, isn't it? The thing that makes this the triumphal entry is that this is the first public pronouncement Jesus makes that He is indeed the king of all, and that He is the Messiah. Every other time in His ministry, He told the disciples to keep it to themselves, to not spread out to everyone that He is the Messiah. Yet, here He is fulfilling a prophecy that was given in Zechariah 9:9 that declares that the king of all, the king who would bring peace to all nations, would enter into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, and with that king comes the Kingdom of God. Jesus is declaring, in this symbolic way, that He is the long prophesied, long awaited King, and that His Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, is now here.

You may be asking, *what really is the Kingdom of God? What does that mean?* I asked just about every pastor on staff that question this week to see if I could get from him or her a tangible answer. What is the Kingdom of God? Most of the answers weren't sufficient (don't tell them I said that!) so I did the better thing I guess—I Googled it—and I stumbled upon this description of the Kingdom of God. It says that the Kingdom of God refers to the reality that God is a King over a spiritual Kingdom, and that He is inviting people to come into that Kingdom. That Kingdom involves joy, and peace, and fulfillment, and satisfaction, and blessing imaginable and unimaginable. It involves goodness, and grace, and mercy, and kindness in this life, and eternal glory in heaven. That Kingdom involves all of that, and you enter into that Kingdom by putting your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's the message of the Kingdom. God has a Kingdom and He invites you to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the Kingdom of His dear son and you do that by putting your trust in Christ. That is a very ethereal description, isn't it? It sounds great; frankly, it sounds amazing, but what does it actually mean tangibly? And what does the Kingdom of God have to do with your life today? I have pulled what I think are three markers or descriptors from this larger definition of the Kingdom of God that I think will speak to you and speak to your life on a daily basis.

The first marker that the Kingdom of God is here is that we have an opportunity to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. I don't know about you, but I love having good friends, and there are moments when I'm with my friends, whether we are laughing or crying together,

that I think, this is what life is about—interacting with someone else and engaging with them on a personal level. But I also have to admit the fact that as a woman, and I'm not the only one, friendships with other women can be very... ummmm, fill in the blank. But imagine having a relationship with the creator and sustainer of all life, having a friend that can never let you down, a friend whose love and mercy and grace always abounds, a friend who never sleeps nor slumbers and is always there. It reminds me of that hymn that my grandmother's church would always sing almost every Sunday, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." It is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is a marker that the Kingdom of God is now here.

The second marker is that we have an opportunity to experience the goodness of God. My favorite verse, it is my life verse, is from Psalm 27: "I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." I was out of town for about five days and as soon as I got home my kids, I have two sons, they run to the door and they go, "Mommy, mommy, what's for dinner?" So I did what good mothers do, I took them to Chipotle. And as we sat and we were eating Chipotle—the boys got tacos—my oldest son Levi was sitting to the right of me, and whenever Levi has food that is really good, he uhmm-uhmms. He literally eats and he goes uhmm-uhmm-uhmm. So, I had Levi to the right and he's uhmm-uhmms, and my youngest, Jesaia, is sitting across from me, and he's yapping, and I have to be honest, I had no idea what he was talking about, because in that moment I was so acutely aware that I would never get that moment back, and that it was in that moment that I was experiencing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. The Bible tells us that every good and perfect thing comes from God. And if there is anything that is good or honorable or praiseworthy in your life, it is not because of the kingdom of the world that you are experiencing this, it's because of God. That is the marker that the Kingdom of God is now here...goodness.

The third marker is this: it is a call to participate as ambassadors in the Kingdom of God. There are many of you in this room that are ambassadors for the Kingdom and you have amazing stories about the ways that God has used your lives to impact others. We have heard stories about people who have given up corporate jobs to work in the nonprofit sector. We have heard stories of doctors who travel overseas or even work in the mission field in the city. We have a video on Zambia and the impact that this congregation has had. We are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom, to spread the goodness of God into the land.

And when Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem, He was declaring *I am King and my Kingdom is here*. And as we look back at the text, I am struck by the excitement of the people when they see Jesus enter into the city. Ninety-nine percent of them would have been illiterate, and yet they immediately connect Jesus' entering into the city with a prophecy given hundreds of years before in Zechariah 9:9. How amazing is that? And in a very...let's say Scandinavian fashion, they begin to cry out, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" I can see us doing that here, ha-ha. *Hosanna in the highest, the King has come!* But do you know what is striking to me? It's that while the crowds are around Jesus, dancing around and calling out *Hosanna*, Luke 19 tells us that when Jesus entered into the city, He began to weep. The people are surrounding Him, celebrating, and Jesus is crying. And He says to them (in Luke 19:42), "If only you knew today what would make for peace, but your eyes have been blinded."

As we enter into Holy Week this week, I ask you, what are you missing? What are you blinded to as you enter into this momentous occasion where we celebrate the foundation of our faith? If you're like me and you were raised in church your whole life, this is not your first time around the rodeo of Holy Week. I have done this every year of my entire life. I have done the Palm

Sundays; I have done the Maundy Thursdays, and the Good Fridays and the Easter Sundays. And believe it or not, it was my family that was at the overnight prayer vigil the *whole* time, not just the thirty-minute increments—that is not a black church thing, uhm-uhm, you gotta be there the *whole* time. But as you think about this, when is the last time that you have entered into Holy Week humbled by the sacrifice and love that it took for Jesus to enter into that city mindful that of the twelve who were with Him, one would betray Him, another would deny Him, and all but one would be martyred for faith in Him? How mindful must He have been, that before He even got to the end of the week, there would be a crowd larger than the one screaming out “Hosanna”, that would cry out, “Crucify Him.” It’s easy to get stuck in the religious pomp and circumstance of Holy Week and to just go through the motions, but I want to challenge and encourage us to tap into the love, the sacrifice, and the grace that it took for Jesus to enter into Jerusalem.

I am amazed by the way that the people surrounding Jesus recognized Zechariah 9:9. How when they saw Jesus enter in on the donkey, they took the palm branches because this signified, in that time period, Messianic salvation. It signified victory of a great king. And I am also struck by the fact that though God’s Kingdom is here, we have an eternal promise that there will one day come a time when Jesus will return, and there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more hardship. It reminds me of a verse in Revelation 7, and it says:

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

[Revelation 7:9-12]

As we enter into this week, be mindful of the fact that you are right now experiencing the Kingdom of God on earth. But also be aware of the fact that we have an eternal wait of glory that will come, where we will all surround the throne, robed in white with palm branches, singing blessing and glory and honor to our God. Pray with me.

Father God, I thank you so much for who You are. I thank you, Lord, for Your sacrifice and for Your son. And God, I pray that as we enter into this week, this Holy Week, that we would be mindful of what it is that You did for us, God. Father God, I pray that our eyes would not be blinded and it would not be hidden from our eyes. Be with us God. May we journey with You. And Father God, I pray that You would receive all the glory and the honor and the praise. And we pray these things in the matchless and the incomparable name of the one who died on the cross. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.