

Matthew 21:1-11 Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (on a colt) to cheering crowds
Luke 19: 28-40

Christian worship today is often called Palm/Passion Sunday. It was designed for people who can't (or don't want to) attend any other Holy Week services. The typical scripture/week takes us from Palm Sunday all the way to Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

In past years, the United Church (among others) has tied these two themes together in one service. Maybe because of people's busy schedules....work, school, or travel....other..

But there is a recent movement, in Protestant churches, to have several services; one on each day of the week during Holy Week. I believe it's important for our own personal faith to make time to attend as many of these service as we can, particularly the Good Friday service. (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday.) Although this year we can't, unless virtually. If we don't, it's kind of like reading chapters one, two and three of a book, and then jumping ahead to chapters seven, eight and nine...without experiencing the important information chapters 7, 8 and 9 bring to the story. We understand Good Friday is not the happiest of services, but that's the point, that's the whole point of Easter morning.

Today the focus is on Palm Sunday...Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Perhaps today should be called "Cloak Sunday." It may be Palm Sunday, but it might also be called cloak-Sunday. In Luke's gospel there is no mention of waving palm branches, or laying them in the street, or singing loud Hosannas describing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

It's hard to imagine Palm Sunday without them.

These Hosannas, these praises are shouted out by Jesus' own disciples, not just the twelve, but a whole multitude who have followed him throughout his ministry. These are the people who have seen great things, who have been so moved by Jesus' words and acts of healing, compassion, and defiance they couldn't help but sing out as Jesus triumphantly enters their holy city.

Jesus; the hope of a people who long for deliverance from the powers that oppress them. Luke writes the people echo the words of the prophet Zechariah of long ago, when they name Jesus as the king "who comes in the name of the Lord."

In the book, "The Last Week", by Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan, the opening pages tell of two very different processions coming into Jerusalem that day.

On one hand, there is the Roman Empire's representative, Pontius Pilate, arriving on a magnificent warhorse and a military force in all its powerful splendor. Imagine a cavalry of horses, many foot soldiers, leather armour, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. The sound of marching feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums keeping everyone in time. The swirling of dust, the crowd frightened.

Pilate and his army have arrived to "keep the peace" as they normally do during Passover when the crowds often can get a bit out of hand. Or so they think.

On the other hand, Jesus makes his entrance riding a humble donkey (think back to the day his mother rode a donkey as she and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem.) Jesus is surrounded by a ragged, but excited group of followers.

We know Jesus doesn't keep the same kind of peace Pilate does. He is bringing a peace that passes all understanding. The events of the next few days will be the price he has to pay for that peace.

His disciples, though, have seen things that have changed their lives forever. Most likely, they aren't exactly sure what to expect, especially when they see their Teacher riding a donkey, of all things. But this donkey (sometimes referred to as a "colt") has never been ridden, as is the custom for sacred events, so they must have realized something out of the ordinary was happening, but as usual, they weren't exactly sure what. A common donkey isn't the sort of animal you'd ride into battle, but then this is no triumphant warrior, no powerful conqueror coming into the city,.....this is the Prince of Peace.

But the Pharisees, kind of in the middle, they could see trouble coming. They could see Pilate entering with his army through one gate, and Jesus riding on that silly donkey through another. They knew just how bad things could get if Rome felt threatened, even by a joyful group of followers.

"Teacher, tell your followers to hush up.....they're going to bring down the Roman soldiers on all of us ...don't cause any trouble."

"It's no use," Jesus said, "Even if you could get everyone to quiet down, the very stones would shout out the good news." The disciples, along with the crowd, are just too excited to be worried about anything, after the things they've seen they aren't afraid of anyone! Their faith has been strengthened, and their hopes raised to dream of things they/we can only imagine.

This story of Jesus entering Jerusalem is the beginning of the holiest of weeks for Christians. Of course, there is no such thing as an off-season for Christians. It's an everyday thing...week in and week out, 24-7. Not just Sundays, not just Holy Days (Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday), not just when we haven't slept in, not just when we're praying or reading the Bible, being a Christian is an 'every-moment, every day of our lives' thing. A life-long journey we call it.

But this is Holy Week, the end of the season of Lent, a season of wilderness-walking, reflecting, reading, praying and watching. A season of turning, turning around, turning back to God. Re-centering our lives on God, on God who has maybe slipped away. The Lenten Season was about looking inward, and asking ourselves the hard questions...about whether we're ready to follow Jesus, all day, every day. Sure, it's fine when there's a parade like today, but what about when it really gets tough? What about when it ends at a cross?

This week, as we stumble towards Jerusalem, we can rely on God's grace to carry us each step of the way. Today, in this one brief moment, we can throw our cloaks on the ground for Jesus to walk on, wave our palm branches as he passes by, and sing our Hosannas. And we can trust the God who works for good in every circumstance, is working in every Holy Week of our lives.