

Jesus comes into Jerusalem riding a donkey. And in typical fashion for the gospel of Matthew, we have fulfillment language... “This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet... Your king is coming to you, riding on a Donkey.” Matthew is welding the story of Jesus to the Old Testament

Many years ago, when the kids were little, we took a vacation to South Dakota. One of the places we went to was the badlands. And we went on trail ride... We each got a horse, except Jon-- he got a donkey. And it looked like a rabbit. Huge ears and a little body.

Jon was a good sport. He was just happy to hang out with cowboys. But I remember thinking, I hope he’s not offended. Jesus comes riding on a donkey, rather than in a chariot of Gold or on the shoulders of others, Jesus arrives on a donkey.

There are human ways of doing things, and then there are divine ways of doing things... As Jesus would say, “Those, who are exalted will be humbled, and those who are humbled will be exalted.” This topsy-turvy vision, we find it everywhere in the gospels...

Just imagine the mob of people that day in Jerusalem, greeting Jesus, they are laying down their cloaks and waving palm branches, yelling, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

We typically think of the word, “Hosanna,” as one of being joyful and exuberant, kind of like meaning, “Yay, Let’s have a Party.” But in truth it couldn’t be more opposite, it literally means “Help, Save Us.” There’s an element of desperation...

The mob is an interesting group of people. Some of them have been waiting for a new King David. A strong military leader who would restore Israel to its former glory. A country not only to be feared, but revered among other nations.

Some people were hoping for a new messiah, a new spiritual leader like Moses who would liberate the people from the bondage of Rome, and establish a new covenant with His people.

Lots of different people, lots of different expectations... Kind of an explosive context, filled with all kinds of danger, and within the week, these same people, yelling Hosanna, will be yelling “crucify him.”

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, we wave our palm branches and sing *All Glory, Laud and Honor*. And we talk about how Jesus is the savior of the world; and He most certainly is... But for the people in Jerusalem, during that week, they didn’t see it. Again, this topsy-turvy vision...

This morning I'd like to do some reflecting with the fact that Jesus goes to Jerusalem. This is not a little thing. In another gospel, it says that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knows exactly what awaits him. Jesus is fully aware of the social dynamics, the religious jealousies, the political tensions... For Jesus, this is a little like walking into a war zone...

These people were living in a tense situation-- Roman occupation. They're basically just trying to keep the Romans happy. You see, they were a powerful empire and army.

The Romans were brutal... In fact, they were the ones who designed crucifixion; they intended it to be as painful as possible and as slow and visible as possible, to act as a deterrent. They often left people on crosses for months, as a reminder of what happens to people who get out of line.

These times were fearful and tense, and people were looking for a change. And Jesus enters the picture. They've heard stories of his healing; they've proclaimed him a prophet. Surely, they think, Jesus is the one who is ordained by God to bring them change and salvation. Hosanna, help, save us...

This upcoming week, this passion story is disturbing in so many ways. Jesus, who is completely innocent, will be betrayed, arrested, brought before a Roman governor, and crucified on a cross. And the whole travesty itself, is started by the religious people. That fact makes me cringe. The Pharisees and Sadducees began plotting to kill Jesus almost from the beginning.

This is amazing to me... You see, they have commandment number 5, thou shalt not kill. The hypocrisy of all this is off the charts.

And ironically, the one person in the story, who seems to be devoid of any moral conscience at all, is exactly the one who sees this story for what it is-- a sham. Pilate is actually the one person who tries to let Jesus go... And yet, even

Pilate, has to bend to the political head winds. And eventually he submits to the mob... And Jesus, a completely innocent man, is crucified.

My friends, right now, we are living under a lot of fear and uncertainty. Right now, we don't know what the future will bring... Right now, we don't know how long this thing will last... Many of us are ready to shout "Hosanna, help, save us..."

Some of the projections are scary... We wonder if we'll be laid-off or fired. A lot of questions, not many answers. We learn what we can, and we wait and watch... What are we supposed to do? I've never lived through anything like this, and neither have you. Perhaps you can join me in saying: Hosanna, help save us, **"Hosanna, Help Save Us."**

There's a lot of fear; and a lot of people are pointing their fingers at each other. States are blaming the federal government... Federal government is blaming the states... Democrats are blaming republicans and vice versa... And it's not just politics, the religious nuts are jumping in... And of course, there's plenty of hypocrisy all around for everyone...

And interestingly, even amidst all this rancor, people are stepping up to the plate to do the right thing and love their neighbor. Jesus goes to Jerusalem; out of love and sacrifice... he knows what awaits him. Jesus goes to Jerusalem...

Have you noticed? Have you noticed health care workers going to work? Have you noticed people on the front lines in our essential businesses going to work? Teachers teaching... Companies who are developing tests and vaccines and

medical equipment going to work... These people are following Jesus and going to Jerusalem. That's what I'm seeing... Making sacrifices...

Even the painful act of just staying home is following Jesus. We're all keeping physical distance from each other **because** we love each other.

Jesus knows what it's like to walk into a scary situation and love people. And so, do many in our families, many of our friends and neighbors.

Brothers and sisters, in the life of faith, this is where the rubber hits the road. This stuff is getting more real all the time. And the good news is that Jesus went to Jerusalem. And we yell, Hosanna, Save Us... And that's exactly what he does!

God knows what we are going through. He will always be there to take our hand and give us strength and courage. This too will pass, and just like next Sunday, resurrection comes...

When the woes of life o'er take me, hopes deceive and fears annoy, never shall the cross forsake me, lo, it glows with peace and joy... Amen, Let us sing...