

## **Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist**

### **Matthew 21:1-11**

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anybody says anything to you, say that the Lord needs it.” He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, “Say to daughter Zion, ‘Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.’” The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then He sat on them.

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of Him and behind Him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they asked. The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## 1. Dominance

When you write with a pencil, which hand do you use? More than likely, it is your right hand. Only about 10 percent of the human population is left-handed. We are a right-hand-dominant species. Very few other species in the world show such strongly right-dominant traits. Many other species, including cats, dogs, and birds, are about 50 percent right- or left-dominant.

If you are left-handed, as I am, you've probably noticed your minority status among righties. Scissors, desks, computer mice, knives, and so many other daily implements have been designed with the expectation that the user will be right-hand dominant.

You have probably heard about how historically left-handed people were said to be marked with a curse, or perhaps that their left-handedness was the product of bad upbringing or poor posture. In fact, in Latin, the word for "left" means "sinister." When something is "correct" in English, we say it is "right." In the Bible, left-handedness is scarcely a positive thing. It is associated with deceit or trickery in battle. Some of you may have been born with a left-hand preference but were "corrected" by your parents or caregivers to become right-handed so as to avoid these superstitions about left-hand-dominant persons.

Still, even given all the difficulties of being left-handed in a right-dominant world, left-handedness persists. Despite the historical oppression of left-handedness, it still persisted.

## **2. Wanting Attention**

In our social-media obsessed culture, we assume that everyone wants to be in the spotlight. Everyone wants attention. That's what Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok want us to believe. But being the center of attention can be exhausting and isolating, too.

Actor George Clooney said in a recent interview, "There are restrictions to this kind of fame. I haven't walked in Central Park for 15 years. I'd like to, you know?"

Actor Johnny Depp said in an interview on the Today show, "(Being famous) is a little bit like living like a fugitive. Everything has to be some sort of strategy. To get you into the hotel, to get you out of the hotel, to get you into the restaurant, to get you out of the restaurant." Fame is a double-edged sword. There are benefits, but also there is often a price to pay that not everyone sees.

## **3. Jesus' Attention**

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is making arrangements to enter the city of Jerusalem for Passover week. He knows He can't just enter quietly, anonymously. He also realizes there has to be some sort of strategy. Too many people have heard about His teachings, how he confounds the rules of the Pharisees and the arrogance of the Sadducees—how he's not afraid of the religious leaders or the Roman government. Too many people have heard

about His miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000 and the healing of the man born blind.

So the crowds are primed and ready for a show. Instead of the “Rumble in the Jungle,” they’re expecting the “Tempest in the Temple.” As word spreads through the crowd that this Jesus from Nazareth is coming to town, the people throw down palm branches in His path—symbols of victory and peace—and shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

By the end of the week a mood of hate and hostility has supplanted the mood of hosanna. Even His own disciples betrayed Him, denied Him, fled from Him. Ironically, He never turned His back on any of them. He came to save the most hostile and hateful, whether it be the thief on the cross or Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him. Jesus embodied the Amazing Grace we celebrate in song. So why is the world so hostile to Jesus Christ? How did we go from the palm branches and parades to the crown of thorns and the cross?

The world is hostile to Jesus because of who He says He is. The world is hostile to Jesus because of what he intends to do. The world is hostile to Jesus because His kingdom is eternal, not immediate.

#### **4. Palm Sunday**

On Palm Sunday, we acclaim the arrival of our King. This day contains within it both tragedy and acclamation. Jerusalem receives her long-expected Messiah, but the same people who here regale Jesus will soon revile Jesus. Faithfulness and faithlessness are never too far from each other.

First is the acclamation. God orchestrates Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem in at least two ways. First, as when He directs the disciples to find a ready-made room for a Passover meal, He commands two disciples to go into a village and take a colt and a donkey. If anyone attempts to stop their seeming theft, they simply need to say that the Lord needs them. Second, for the twelfth time, Matthew ties Jesus' life to the prophets. For Matthew, God is clearly in control of all things even as—especially as—Jesus approaches the cross.

Soon will come the tragedy and the rejection of Jesus. Even as we wave our palm branches, the long shadow of Good Friday is on the horizon.

#### **5. Who Is This?**

Who is this? Martha Spong says that it is no wonder they asked.

We wave our palms and smile at the children and feel the joy of—well, what is the joy we're feeling, exactly? We're likely remembering being little children ourselves, going to church and having something to do that wouldn't happen any other day of the year, marching around the sanctuary and waving the palms. We feel festive! It's a party! Even good Americans, who would never want a king, love King Jesus riding into the city, and the sweet hosannas being sung, asking Him to save us.

Who is this? A man on a donkey, riding into town, was not the amazing sight. It was the people around Him and their clear adoration of Him that got the attention of the authorities, which set the events of the rest of that week in motion.

In the days to come, we will remember events more dramatic and less celebratory. We will follow Jesus to the Upper Room, and out to the Garden of Gethsemane. We will hear Him pray and feel His disappointment when His friends can't stay awake and wait for Him even for an hour. We will shudder at His arrest and trial and crucifixion. We will wonder how anybody could think of betraying Him.

Maybe for a minute we'll realize that we would have been just like the people around Jesus, as helpless to stop the earthly powers, as sleepy as the men and as silent as the women who followed Him from Galilee into Jerusalem, the same friends and followers who started the week cheering for Him.

Maybe, just maybe, we will step outside of our own stories and wonder how it felt for Jesus. In Philippians, Paul stresses that Jesus lived the human experience right up to the end. He had both the form of God and the form of a human. He rode into Jerusalem on that donkey as both. He did not use the power of God to save the mortal body. He rode in that day prepared to take whatever would come.

This we should celebrate, although the form our joy takes feels as solemn as it does festive. We come to the end of Lent, to the beginning of this Holy Week, and we worship God who loved us enough to be one of us: to live as one of us and to die as one of us.

## **6. Life is Difficult**

Scott Peck wrote the book “The Road less Traveled.” His first words are, “Life is Difficult.” Then he goes on to say,

“This is a great truth, but most of us can’t see it. Instead we moan more or less incessantly, noisily, or subtly, about the enormity of our problem. As if life is supposed to be easy for us, and therefore what has happened to us has never happened to anybody else before, at least not in this excruciatingly painful or insoluble way that it has burdened us.”

Peck says that he wrote that not because as a therapist he hears his patients say that, but because he has been tempted to

say that himself. You could call it the “Law of Exceptionalism,” the idea that this has never happened before, at least not to the degree that it has happened to me.

There was a cartoon from a long time ago. It showed a huge desk, a huge CEO sitting behind the desk, in a huge leather chair. Standing meekly in front of the desk is a man in work clothes, obviously a lowly employee in that corporation. The worker says to the boss, “If it’s any comfort, it’s lonely at the bottom, too.”

Life is difficult for everyone. Someone once explained why they didn’t like Lent. He said, “I’m not into suffering.” Like it’s optional. Like it’s an adopted lifestyle.

Jesus was not into suffering either. You remember He prayed, “Let this cup pass from me.” When the time came, He knew what he had to do.

Our world is going through much suffering. The COVID-19 Virus is forcing this world through something we’ve never experienced. We can only get through this with God at our sides, Jesus in our hearts, and with each of us connected to the other. Let us keep connected the best we can. Check up on each other. Help each other. Things may be different, but God never changes, and loves us as always.