

Our Scripture today is from John 12:12-19—the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem  
 It's the familiar story we tell on Palm Sunday—a story of praise, joy, and palm branches  
 The high moment of glory before the crucifixion and death in 5 days  
 But when we look at the context—  
 Can it simply be a joyful story of Jesus on a donkey followed by children and palm branches?

For some time now, things have been bad between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Jews  
 In chapter 2, Jesus cleansed the temple—breaking up the economic pay back to temple leaders  
 Nicodemus, a Pharisee, visits Jesus under the cover of night—when others wouldn't see him  
 In chapter 5, Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath—breaking Jewish law  
 Jesus called God his Father and claimed the authority of God, his Father  
 Etc.  
 But recently it escalated until there was an open search for an opportunity to kill Jesus  
 In chapter 10, they accused Jesus of blasphemy—as a human making himself God  
 They picked up stones and tried to arrest Jesus, but he escaped from their hands  
 Lazarus died and was resurrected by Jesus  
 The crowds grew and many believed Jesus because of this  
 But the Pharisees and Chief Priests realized they had a real problem!  
*"What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." John 11:47-48 NRSV*  
 Caiaphas said it is better for one to die for the people than the whole nation be destroyed  
 At that, the Pharisees and Chief Priests planned to put Jesus to death  
 Then there is this dinner in Bethany in honor of Jesus and Lazarus, where Mary anoints Jesus

We pick up the story here, reading John 12:9-19

Jesus enters into Jerusalem, riding on the back of a donkey while children wave palm branches in his honor  
 The people who followed Jesus, his disciples, the children, the curious—the crowds came to see  
 They were grateful for the miracles he had done and the hope that he gave to them  
 Hope that God heard their cries and had sent them someone who would save them  
 They gathered around him, throwing down palm branches and waving them in honor  
 Shouting "*Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!*"  
 The Messiah has come! God would deliver them from the Roman rule! They would be free!

But for Jesus to enter Jerusalem, riding on the back of a donkey while palm branches waved in his honor  
 Was actually a bold prophetic sign—Jesus was coming as King  
 It wasn't a passive thing where the people said it and he didn't deny it  
 He was intentional in what he was doing—he tells the disciples to get a donkey  
 First—it was a deliberate claim that he was the Messiah  
 Jesus is doing a dramatic reenactment of the words of Zechariah in Zechariah 9:9  
*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Zechariah 9:9-10 NRSV*  
 The people were ecstatic—their King had come to save them!

Second—Jesus rides into the city on a donkey—not a horse  
Kings generally rode in on a horse when they were going to war  
Riding on a donkey was a sign of peace—Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace  
In their excitement over Jesus as Messiah and King—they paid little attention to the peace  
Surely Jesus as King would proclaim victory and defeat the Romans  
Jesus' dramatic entrance as the Prince of Peace was evident, but few recognized it

The religious leaders of the Jews—the Pharisees and Chief Priests—got the message

Jesus entered the city on a donkey in the tradition of Zechariah  
Their way of life and ordered existence was threatened  
It could destroy everything that they had established

Jesus was a wanted man—yet he entered in this bold and dramatic way—claiming he is King  
The Messiah has come—The Prince of Peace is here!

It was an “in your face” bold statement that Jesus is here to be seen and Jesus is King  
It was a statement for peace and justice and following the ways and methods of God  
It was a call for change and new ways of being in the world—following the Prince of Peace  
It was a threat to Rome, Herod, and the system of oppression and control established  
It was a threat to empire and the domination system of powers so pervasive in the world  
It is a reminder that God is victorious and will overcome  
A victory that remembers and honors the oppressed—the poor, prisoner, homeless, etc  
A victory of God overcoming the impossible odds  
That the ways of the Prince of Peace are more able to enact real change than methods of war

Inherent in this story is an invitation ...not just to praise God

But to join God... to be a people who care about the oppressed  
...to believe in God's victory over the impossible  
...to celebrate that God has renewed his warfare on behalf of the oppressed

Jesus is King—of the Kingdom of God—heaven on earth—where we live out the truth of God among us

Jesus has not come in some other worldly way with his only intention to bring peace of soul  
Jesus has come as the Prince of Peace into our broken world—just as he came into Jerusalem  
Jerusalem was a broken place with oppression, foreign rule, and corruption

Jesus' triumphal entry into the brokenness of Jerusalem was an assertion of Divine Order  
In the face of all that is broken—we are not powerless—God is present and working  
We join God at work as we enact the Divine Order of the Kingdom of God  
Every act opposite of the domination system is an act of Divine Order  
It disrupts the oppression and allows for goodness to enter

We are part of the Kingdom of God, bringing heaven to earth—we continue the work today

But let us not give up on praise...

Praise, Laugh, Love, and Sing  
These all break the grip of the powers—and befuddle them  
They are opposite of the outcome domination is seeking and counting on  
It seems weak, but praise breaks the power of the enemy—breaks the power of evil  
So, our waving palm branches and singing praises to Jesus enacts heaven on earth...  
It calls forth the Divine Order of the Kingdom of God even in the presence of other powers  
Let us stand and take our full place as participants with the Prince of Peace, our Messiah