

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