

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Psalm 118:19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Matthew 21:12-17

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priest and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying? Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?" He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Sermon

“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’”

Matthew describes Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as both joyous and frightening. The shouts of the people as they threw down their cloaks and branches to create a royal entry. The busy city, disrupted by the parade and wonder who is this. Jerusalem was used to parades, the coming of political and military leaders, of the Roman army marching. Even now, possibly on the same day, there would have been a parade of power and might, armies and chariots, escorting Pilate in from the west. But the parade from the east had no chariots, no armies, and it seemed that the man being celebrated was riding on a lowly donkey. “Who is this?” They would say, “Why should we care, what is he going to do, what’s the fuss - tell me what’s happening.”

For those who joined in the crowd and followed this parade into town, they probably were not surprised that they took the road that lead to the temple, politicians and so-called prophets often used the holy place as a back drop for their speeches and antics. But I would dare to say that no one was prepared for Jesus’ first encounter with the money changers and sellers and buyers of goods just inside the first temple wall. The seemingly joyous parade quickly turned to what looked like a riotous mob, only instead of the crowd turning on the city, it was just one man, it was only Jesus driving out the market people and turning over their tables.

Did the crowd cheer Jesus on as he went into a fit of rage, or did they shrink back in fear of Jesus and of what the authorities would do? Here is a man the disciples have seen love and heal and even gently teach the people and the religious authorities along the way. A man of compassion and mercy, suddenly turn into a zealous figure, a man on a mission. “Who is this?” the city asked. And I imagine the people of the market said, “He is a rebel, a criminal, a dangerous and foolish man. It would be easier for these men to stand later in the week and shout, “Crucify Him.” They did not celebrate his coming, because it threatened their way of life.

But then, almost as quickly as the one man riot began, it ended. The market was cleared, and Jesus took up shop. He sat in the temple, and the blind and the lame came to him. “Who is this man?” they asked. He is a prophet, he can cure us and make us whole. Suddenly, those who were the riffraff of society, the throwaways who should not been seen in polite company, let alone in the house of the Lord, suddenly these are the ones gathering, flocking to the temple. An encounter with Jesus was an encounter with new life, new sight, new abilities to use arms and legs. The unclean, the people who the church has rejected because they believed they were full of sin, the smelly, unwanted, unwelcome - these were now embraced by Jesus, embraced by the temple, embraced by the love and mercy of God. Suddenly the relevance of faith took on a new meaning. Suddenly the body of Christ became the true temple, the place where God resided.

“Who is this man?” The children sang out their answer, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Through the eyes of the infant, of the children, there was no doubt about Jesus’ identity. Here is the king, the Son of David, heir to the throne. Here is the anointed one, the messiah who has come to set us free. Here is the blessed redeemer, the salvation of Israel, King of the Jews!”

“Who is this man?” It is our question as well. At times, we are like the people in the market, frightened of Jesus and what he might do, what he is doing. There are tables of comfort and tables of profit at the expense of others, we have tables of abundance that we keep to ourselves, and tables of power that we only share with those of power. How frightening it is when we realize that our encounter with Jesus today, this week, at any time, might be one where he comes into our lives to throw over our tables, our powers, our comforts, our privileges.

“Who is this man?” If we have ever felt his healing touch, his peaceful presence, his restoring words. If we have recognized our own marginalization, our rejection, our blindness, our disabilities in mind or body, then Jesus is hope. In Jesus we find true faith, we find new life, we find a holy temple where the least and the last are welcomed in.

“Who is this man?” If we are open to the question, to the encounter with one who will turn over some of the tables in our life, but will also give us new sight and strength, who will restore us to faith and life - if we are open to the question, then I invite you to walk with him through this week, to the table and the garden, to the trial and to the cross, walk with his body to the tomb, and wait for him there. Come on the difficult journey, and encounter him for yourself. Amen