

It is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of our preparation for Christmas, the birth of our Savior, Jesus. But consider how the Gospel reading was about Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem of Jesus as the King of Israel just days before his crucifixion. The reason for this Gospel reading today is the ancient tradition of the church, that we would remember that while Christmas was the introduction of Jesus to humanity as its savior, this was only a prelude of his promise to come to humankind as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, conquering sin, death, and the devil once and for all.

This morning we're going to talk about what Jesus' kingship means for us today in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 21:1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth-phage, to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Let's walk through the Gospel, reading a few verses at a time:

Matthew 21:1-3

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth-phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and

bring them to me.”³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."

What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples to tell others that “the Lord needs them,” that is, the donkeys? Some say the use of the word, “Lord,” might be a trick, and that the person holding the animals was supposed to believe that the owner – whom he might call “lord” in the human sense – had given them permission to take them. Of course, that would’ve been a lie, and it would’ve been inconsistent with Jesus’ character. Others think “Lord” may’ve inferred some service the disciples intended to perform on behalf of Yahweh, who was also called, “Lord.” But this too would’ve been dishonest. Rather, Jesus, having already revealed himself to the disciples and others as the Messiah on numerous other occasions was simply turning up the volume as regards his true identity as their long anticipated savior. I think he was preparing his followers for a time of reflection after his ascension into heaven, not unlike what we’re doing today.

Matthew 21:4-8

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The people wanted a king who had political savvy and military might; they wanted someone with fire-power; they wanted Rambo! For they had been oppressed by other empires for hundreds of years, by the Romans presently, and they longed for deliverance. But what they thought they needed was not what God knew they needed.

Jesus entered the Holy City on a donkey as a sign: He gave witness to the kind of king he was. You may be familiar with the ancient tradition: If a king came riding into a conquered city on a stallion, it was a sign that he intended to enslave the people with hard labor. On the other hand, if a king entered a conquered city riding on a donkey, he came in peace with the promise to rule over the people mercy.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was a sign from the Lord for all generations. He was and he is the King of Peace.

Matthew 21:9

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

"Hosanna" means "to save," as in, "Salvation comes from the Son of David!" and "Salvation comes from the most high God!"

Salvation was the people's single greatest hope, salvation from political and economic tyranny that is. It is only natural that we should believe that if we could only change our external environment, our political system or economic condition, or perhaps where we live or work or go to church, if the things outside of me were only different, then everything inside of me would be better. But we're always surprised. Even with that new job or contract, that A on an exam or a promotion, or that new car or house, everything in here (in my heart) remains the same.

And there's the reckoning: With so many others I stand at the gates of the Holy City. I'm throwing palm branches before the prophet's donkey, and I cry out, "Hosanna in the highest!" And I get a brief glimpse into his eyes as he passes by. It was just a split second, but I realized he was looking into my heart. And in his eyes I saw love and sorrow, compassion and empathy, and I realized that he had no intention of changing the world the way I wanted him to. Rather, he intended to change me.

In Jesus' time and before, conquering nations had two ways of taking over a new land. One way was to just kill all the rebels and rule the remaining citizens with an iron fist, as Assyria and Rome did. The other way was to exile the intelligentsia and repopulate the territory with one's own subjects, as Babylon did.

But Jesus created a new way of ruling. He wasn't going to kill or exile anyone. Rather, he was going to change the people in their hearts, transforming them from hateful, mean-spirited rebels into children of God, a people filled with the fruit of the Spirit, with love, joy, peace, and patience, a people whose own lives would change their external environment.

Matthew 21:10-11

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

The question, “Who is this?” was kind of a rhetorical question. They all knew Jesus was a prophet, but they didn’t understand that he was the great prophet who would follow Moses, the one who was even greater than Moses, the one whom Moses himself had foretold, the great prophet who would die for the people, who would rise on the third day, and who would send down his Spirit on humanity to create children of God on earth, ambassadors of the King of Peace.

There are many things outside of ourselves which we desire, even crave, but the one thing we need more than anything else is peace in our hearts, peace in our families, peace in our schools and workplaces, peace in our church and in our friendships. We long for peace of mind, knowing that what we’re doing with our lives has meaning.

For me, peace of mind often alludes me when I think about relationships I have broken, things I’ve said in anger which I’ve later regretted, and decisions I’ve made which were not as altruistic as I hoped they would appear.

But Jesus came into the world as the King of Peace, with the gift of peace for each one of us, a gift that is a gift from his own heart. Jesus made peace between his disciples when they bickered, he gave peace to an adulteress when he forgave her for her sins, he gave peace to a leper when he healed his body, he gave a demon-possessed man peace when he delivered him from his own hell, and he blessed you and me with peace in our relationship with God when he died on the Cross on Calvary.

This peace becomes real for me when I meditate on the Cross where Jesus took away my shame before God. This peace comes to me when I reflect on my Lord’s ascension into heaven, about how he conquered death and he will come again to take me home. This peace comes to me when I remember my baptism and my Lord’s body and blood which I’ve received at this altar. This peace fills me with confidence and courage, hope in the future and a word of encouragement for the people in my life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the peace that passes all understanding.

This week may our meditation be on how the Lord has changed us through the Cross, the Resurrection, and with the Sacraments, that we have been transformed into emissaries of the King of Peace.

This week may we take the peace of God which we possess in our hearts into our homes and schools, and into our workplaces and into the public square, sharing with others this gift which changed our lives.

And this week may we have the opportunity to share this teaching with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.