

It's the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of our preparation for Christmas, the birth of our Savior, Jesus. But consider how the Gospel reading is about Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem of Jesus as the King of Israel just days before his crucifixion. The reason for this 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 the first part of his promise to come to us as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

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,² saying 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."⁴ 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.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!"¹⁰ 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."

Let's walk through the Gospel 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,² saying 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 (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 would’ve been only a half truth. Rather, Jesus, having already revealed himself to the disciples and others as the Messiah was simply turning up the volume as regards his true identity as their long awaited savior. I think he was preparing his followers for that time when they would see him truly as their Lord, Lord of everything in their lives, just as we do 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 the Terminator! For they had been oppressed for hundreds of years, 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 would be. There was the tradition that if a new king came riding into a conquered city on a stallion, it was a sign he intended to enslave the people with hard labor. On the other hand, if a new king entered a conquered city riding a donkey, he came in peace with the promise to rule over the people with mercy.

Thus Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey as 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 from the Son of David!," and "Salvation from the most high God!"

Salvation was the people's single greatest hope, salvation from political and economic tyranny, that is. But who can blame them? It's only natural that we should believe that if we could change our external environment, our political system or economic condition, or perhaps where we live or work, 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, an "A" on an exam or a promotion, or that new car or house, everything in here (in my heart) remains the same.

But imagine that we're standing at the gate of the Holy City. We're throwing palm branches before the prophet's donkey, and we cry out, "Hosanna in the highest!" And we get a brief glimpse into his eyes as he passes by. It was just a split second, but we realized he was looking into our hearts. And in his eyes, we saw his love, his sorrow, and we saw his compassion, and we realized that he had no intention of changing the world the way we wanted him to change it. Rather, he intended to change you and me from the inside out.

In Jesus' time when a nation conquered another one it did one of two things: It would kill all the rebels and rule the remaining citizens with an iron fist, as Assyria and Rome did. Or it would exile the intelligentsia and repopulate the territory with its 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 people in their hearts, transforming them from mean-spirited rebels into children of God, a people filled with the fruit of the Spirit, with love, joy, and peace, 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."

When the people asked, “**Who is this?**” they knew Christ 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, whom Isaiah foretold, the one who would rise on the third day, and who would send down his Spirit to make men and women into children of God.

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 relationships. 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 becomes real for me when I reflect on how my Lord will come again to take me home. This peace becomes real for me when I remember my baptism and my Lord’s body and blood which I receive at his 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 is the gift of life from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who rules over all.

This week may our meditation be filled with thanksgiving for how the Lord has changed us through his Cross, the Resurrection, and with the Sacraments, transforming us into emissaries of the King of Peace.

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

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