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Scripture: The Gift – Jesus as King

Parades. Don't you love a parade? In my hometown of Kitchener, we have one of the largest parades around. Every October, Carolyn and I used to bundle up our kids, stop at Tim Horton's for some coffee, hot chocolate and Tim Bits. Then proceed to King Street, where we would stake out a position along the curb to prepare to watch the Oktoberfest parade with its array of colourful floats and marching bands.

For some of you, maybe it is the Santa Claus parade that holds fond memories. Different cities and towns have their own variation of what a parade looks like.

Carolyn's parents used to own a cottage close to Kincardine and during our visits there in the summer we discovered a very unique tradition on Saturday nights in Kincardine. Anyone know what it is? A parade. They would have a parade led by a Scottish band and the crowd that gathered could actually join in the procession. My kids, young at the time, thought that was amazing. To march in a parade!

Two parade highlights for me actually happened here in London.

In the fall of 1986, as a university student at Western, I lined a parade route with hundreds of others on the day that Rick Hansen, remember his Man in Motion World Tour, pushed his wheel chair down Western Road. He was greeted with shouts of appreciation, support and adulation.

My second parade memory in London occurred rather by accident. Again, I was a student and got caught up in a bit of a mob scene outside of the UCC Building at Western. Suddenly it seemed like the crowd parted as then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his entourage walked through.

I wasn't particularly interested in politics at the time but I wormed my way through the masses to catch a glimpse. It is not every day you see a Prime Minister up close. I even stretched out my hand as he went by and Pierre shook it. Which is kind of cool.

What are your parade memories? Perhaps some of you took in the action around Budweiser Gardens downtown recently when the Juno Awards were in town. You may have lined up along the red carpet as the music celebrities paraded past.

You may have even joined a parade route virtually via television. Did anyone watch Prince Harry marry Meaghan Markle last May? Do you remember the carriage ride after the wedding? Thousands of spectators lined the parade route to cheer the couple.

Or maybe it was seven years earlier, when Prince William married Kate. Have a look at what the parade for a future King looks like. **(video)**. It speaks of power, prestige and majesty. That is quite a scene!

Why all this focus on parades? Today, as we launch our message series as we head towards Easter, we are going to look at a very significant parade that happened in the bible and it involved Jesus.

You may have noticed that we have entitled this Easter Message Series, *The Gift 2.0*. You may remember that our Christmas message series last December was entitled, *The Gift*. This is intentional. This is the second part of that series.

At Christmas our focus was on the three gifts that the Wise Men brought to the infant Jesus shortly after he had been born.

Do you remember the gifts? Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Each one of them had a practical purpose but were also deeply symbolic.

The Gold represented the Kingship of Jesus. Frankincense, a resin, was used in the temple at this time as part of the offerings. It represented Jesus as the great High Priest. Myrrh was a spice used to embalm dead bodies in Jesus' day. This gift represented the sacrifice that Jesus would make by giving his life on the cross.

At the time the Wise Men gave these gifts to an infant Jesus, their symbolism wasn't entirely clear but years later as we now move to Easter, things are beginning to come into focus. Jesus as King, Priest and Sacrifice.

If you have your bibles, I invite you to turn with me to the gospel of Matthew 21:1-11. Join me on a parade route for a different kind of King.

Let me read it to you first and then we can have a closer look.

Matthew 21:1-11

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ² "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them." ⁴ This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, ⁵ "Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt.'" ⁶ The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!

Praise God in highest heaven!" ¹⁰ The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked. ¹¹ And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Now the scene here is important to understand. It is the spring time, somewhere around the year 30 AD. Jesus had just spent the last three years or so, travelling through the towns and villages of Palestine. He preached about the Kingdom of God, healed the sick and performed miracles wherever he went. His audience often included both Jews and Gentiles, of which many were Romans. The nation of Israel during Jesus' time, was under Roman rule and life was difficult for the majority of the Jewish people. Unfortunately, this was a dilemma that plagued Israel throughout much of its history. They were constantly at the mercy of another nation.

At this time, word about Jesus was spreading throughout the countryside. His reputation was growing amongst the Jewish people. Some even dared to wonder, *could he be the Messiah?*

Now let's take a moment to understand this concept of Messiah. Messiah comes from the Hebrew word, *Mashiach* meaning, "the anointed one" or "the chosen one". The Greek equivalent of this word, is *Christos*, or *Christ*. For the Jewish people, the Israelites, the Messiah referred to that great King that God would one day send to earth to defeat their oppressors and establish His reign, here on earth as it is in heaven. Remember, that is what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, *Your Kingdom Come, Lord. On earth as it is in heaven*. Throughout the Old Testament, God promises his people that a Messiah is coming.

Isaiah 42:1 it says,

*"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.
He is my chosen one, who pleases me.
I have put my Spirit upon him.
He will bring justice to the nations.*

In the New Testament, many times in the Gospels, people declared that Jesus was that Messiah. In *Matthew 16:16*, Simon Peter speaking of Jesus declares,

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

In fact Jesus himself declared to be the Messiah when talking to woman at a town well in,

John 4:25-26

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"

So, the backdrop to this story we are looking at today is the rumors and speculation about Jesus' identity. Is he the Messiah, the King and Saviour of the people? Some people believed it and others, most notably the Jewish leaders of this day, were threatened by him. They felt he was honing in on their territory and they wanted him dead.

Look again at

Matthew 21:1 Where is Jesus headed? The text says,

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem.

They are going to Jerusalem, the most important city in Israel. It was the centre of worship and the place where the temple of God was located. Most of Jesus' life and ministry had occurred on the outskirts of this great city, but now he is making a turn. Jesus, in what we now know as the last week of his earthly life, is going to Jerusalem and it happens to be during the festival of Passover. A coincidence? I think not. For the Jewish people, Passover commemorates the night, centuries before the time of Jesus, when the Israelite people were freed from Egypt and Pharaoh's oppressive rule. God passed over their homes marked by the blood of a sacrificed lamb and then brought judgement on Egypt. The lamb has to be killed in order to get the blood that would save the people. This story is described in the second book of the bible, Exodus.

Every year the Israelite people would remember and celebrate this event with a festival called, Passover. So, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem during Passover and the city is bustling. Remember, whenever it is festival time in the ancient Middle East, all Jewish males over the age of 12 from all the outlying areas were required to gather in Jerusalem. The city's population could swell from the norm of around 100 000 to a million or more during this time.

All roads leading into Jerusalem would have a steady stream of travellers making the pilgrimage.

Maybe somewhat like highway 400 heading up to cottage country on the Friday of the May long weekend. It was busy.

Jesus and his disciples are on the road. No doubt he has drawn some attention along the way. There is a crowd that is beginning to gather around him even before he hits the city limits. A few kilometres outside of Jerusalem, Jesus kind of pulls up short. He stops his entourage and then he makes what may appear to be a rather strange request. He looks at two of his disciples and says,

Matthew 21:2-3

"Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

With this one simple request Jesus is about to make a very public statement that not everyone would understand at this time. He asks for a donkey and colt. It seems like a rather odd request but Jesus is up to something. This gesture was to fulfill a prophecy that first uttered back in the Old Testament book of Zechariah 9:9.

Jesus refers to it here in *Matthew 21:5*. He says,

"Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt.'"
Tell the Jewish people, your King, the Messiah, will come to you humbly, riding on a donkey.

Then Jesus waits patiently as more people come around him. A short time later, the disciples return with a donkey and colt in tow. They fling their coats over the animals.

Then, just a few kilometres outside of Jerusalem on a very busy roadway leading into the city on the cusp of Passover, Jesus positions himself atop the donkey's colt. Can you picture it? A parade is about to begin. The King, the promised Messiah is about to begin his procession into the city.

Think of Rick Hansen, the hero pushing his wheelchair as hundreds cheered him on. Think of Pierre Trudeau, the Prime Minister, strutting through the crowd as his security personal are holding back the mob that clamoured around him.

Think of the future King of England, Prince William, the pomp and pageantry surrounding his carriage ride through the streets as thousands waved and cheered. Jesus is greeted with similar enthusiasm in this day. Look at how the text describes the scene.

Matthew 21:8

Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

With more and more people joining the parade route, they began to throw their coats on the ground in front of Jesus. Others spread out palm branches. It was like they were paving the road that lay ahead of him and their actions were deeply meaningful. Laying your garments before a dignitary in this day was seen as a symbol of submission. Through this gesture, the people around Jesus were declaring their allegiance to him as their King.

Palm branches in this day were seen a symbol for victory. A palm branch was awarded to victorious athletes in Ancient Greece. Even today, palm branches represent excellence. Movie aficionados may know that the Palme d'Or (The Golden Palm) is the highest award given out at the Cannes Film Festival each year.

By laying these palm branches at the foot of Jesus and waving them along his parade route, these people in the crowd were expressing their hope that he would be the one who would lead the people in victory over their oppressors.

In *Matthew 21:9* it says,

Jesus was in the center of the procession.

He is the main attraction in this parade. The people around him were laying their garments and palm branches in his path, proclaiming their submission to him and their belief that he will lead them to victory. And they were shouting. You can't have a parade without some shout outs.

I can't tell you what some of the people were shouting at Pierre Trudeau back in the day, but I can tell you what these people were shouting at Jesus.

*"Praise God for the Son of David!
Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!
Praise God in highest heaven!"*

Praise God. We may be more familiar with the NIV translation of this verse that says the crowds were shouting,

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!"
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

Hosanna. A familiar word to those of us in the church. It can be found in some of our worship songs that we sing around here like the one we sang today.

*Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You, we turn to You
Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You, we long for You
'Cause when we see You we find strength to face the day
In Your presence all our fears are washed away,*

*Hosanna, Hosanna
You are the God who saves us, worthy of all our praises
Hosanna, Hosanna
Come have Your way among us, we welcome You here, Lord Jesus*

What does that mean?

The first time Hosanna is used in the New Testament is here in Matthew 21 to describe Jesus' parade route into Jerusalem. It comes from the Hebrew word, *hoshi' a na*. *Psalm 118:25* is the only place where this word *Hoshi' a na* is used in the Old Testament and it is translated in the English,

*LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!*

Hoshi' a na, originally meant *to save*. It was a plea for help. It would be like if you were marooned on a deserted island alone and you spot a boat or plane flying close by, this is what you would yell. *Hoshi' a*

na, Help, save us. It is in moments like these that we realize that we cannot save our self and we need some outside help. By singing Hosanna in our worship, we are declaring to God that we have come to the end of ourselves and we need Him to intervene in our lives. *Save us Lord.*

But there is another meaning to Hosanna. Look at,

Psalms 118:25

LORD, save us!

LORD, grant us success!

But look how it transitions into,

Psalms 118:26

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

Because of the nuance in this passage, Hosanna has also come to be a term used for adoration and praise. *Thank you Lord. Hosanna.* As followers of Jesus, these are the two places we often find ourselves in, don't we? We are either crying out to God for help or we are praise and thanking him for what he has done for us. Hosanna can represent either or both of these sentiments. These are the two places that this crowd around Jesus on this day, find themselves. They are desperate for a King, for the Messiah to come and save them from their enemy and offer them a new day and hope for a better future. They are also overwhelmed with praise, adoration and gratitude given all that have seen in Jesus. That he is the Messiah. He is the one who is going to save them. So they shout at him along his parade route into Jerusalem.

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

So let me just recap the scene unfolding in the text. Let's just get this straight. See if you can stay with me. There are rumors and buzz floating around about Jesus, that he could be the Messiah, the promised King sent by God for his people.

Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem for Passover, a major festival that commemorates a time in the

history of Israel when the blood of an innocent lamb was used to save the people from Pharaoh's rule.

Just as he nears the city limits, Jesus calls his disciples to fetch him the colt of a donkey fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy that tells the people of Jerusalem that their King will actually come to them in humility, riding a lowly donkey.

As Jesus mounts this colt, the crowds that are gathering around him begin to lay their coats and palm leaves in his path symbolizing their submission to him and their belief that he will lead them to victory. As Jesus begins the parade route into Jerusalem, the crowds are yelling, *Hosanna, Hosanna.* God saves! Praise to our God!

Did I get that right? Can you imagine how all this excitement and anticipation is building to a feverish pitch? In fact, it says in,

Matthew 21:10

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered.

When is the last time, you have heard of an entire city being so captivated by a parade?

In 2016, over 5 million people attended a parade in Chicago, Illinois. The occasion? The Chicago Cubs had just won their first World Series Baseball Championship since 1908. After a 108 year championship drought, the baseball fans in Chicago had a lot to celebrate.

Many of you with a Dutch background may remember stories about how the Canadian troops were instrumental in the liberation of the Netherlands from Nazi Germany occupation to end World War II. Have you seen some of the pictures of the Canadian service men and women parading through the streets of the Dutch towns just after the Germans surrendered? There were mobs of people cheering and embracing them for literally saving them.

We know there is a hysteria and a throng of people gathered every time there is a Justin Bieber sighting in his home town of Stratford. It creates quite a buzz.

But, it is hard to imagine anything quite like what was experienced on the streets leading into Jerusalem on this day. The people were welcoming a King. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people laid down their coats and palm branches on the road in front of him and hailed him as the king coming in the name of the Lord. This type of parade was culturally appropriate for this day. A king would ride into town publically and be hailed by cheering crowds. But Jesus deliberately departed from the normal script and did something very different. He didn't ride in on a powerful war horse the way a king should, especially in this time period.

A king in this day would come with power and might and a spectacular show of force. He would make his entry into town in the form of a military parade, leading his mighty army atop a majestic white steed with sword held high! It would be more reminiscent of Prince William and Kate's parade we saw earlier, but Jesus didn't do that. He could of. No, he instead chose to ride on a small donkey. It was a deliberate choice done to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy in Zechariah. That God's chosen King for his people, the Messiah, would be different than any other king the world has ever known.

In Jesus, we find infinite majesty yet complete humility. In Jesus, we find perfect justice yet boundless grace. In Jesus, we find absolute sovereignty yet utter submission. All sufficiency is in him and yet he demonstrates complete trust and dependence on his heavenly father.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on this day, the majority of the people shouting *Hosanna*, were fully expecting him to lead a revolution. The thought he was going to start a war. They expected their Messiah to be a great political and military leader who would finally eradicate their enemy and free them from the tyranny of the Roman Empire and re-establish Israel to its rightful place. As the preeminent nation in the world. But it didn't happen. Although these people would have known some of the biblical prophecies that discuss the glorious victories of the Messiah, they had totally overlooked the ones that said that he would come not as a warring King but as the,

Isaiah 9:6

"Prince of Peace".

They had forgotten the ones that described him as a "Suffering Servant". Listen carefully to how,

Isaiah 53:4-7, describes the coming Messiah

*Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*

*⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was
on him,*

and by his wounds we are healed.

*⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

*⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is
silent,*

so he did not open his mouth.

When the parade came to an end and Jesus dismounted that colt inside the gates of Jerusalem during the festival of Passover, he became the ultimate sacrificial lamb. Instead of leading a rebellion, he laid down his life for the sins of the people.

The people cheering, *Hosanna*, to him along the parade route at the beginning of the week, those same people spit on him, beat him and jeered him with shouts of *Crucify him* as Jesus walked another parade route just five days later. It was a road that led him to Golgotha which ultimately took him to his destiny, the cross.

Why their sudden change of heart? Oh, the people wanted a Messiah, sent by God but he had to be a warrior. He had to conquer the Romans not kneel to them. But that is not the sort of Messiah God sent Jesus to be. God came into this fallen world, through the person of Jesus. He was God in the flesh. His Kingdom goes beyond the boundaries of politics and nationalism. It is a Spiritual Kingdom that does not gain strength by violence and force but

grows in the hearts of people who put their faith and trust in him.

Jesus, the gift from God did come to save humanity, but not from the Romans. He came to save us from ourselves. From our sin and apathy.

He came to save us from a lost eternity and instead offers us life eternal in Him. He laid down his life for us, so that we could live.

How do we respond to this kind of King? We are on a parade route even today. Jesus passes by us every day. Does he meet our expectations? Or are we still waiting for something more. We want more pomp and pageantry, more razzle dazzle. Our world entices with this temptation that there has to be more but when we follow the way of the world, we will never be fully satisfied. We will always be chasing after the next best thing. There will always be a discontent.

That is because Jesus is all we need. Scripture tells us that God has placed a yearning for Jesus in our heart but we try to fill it with something else. It always leaves us feeling empty. That is because Jesus is the only one who can fill that void!

He is right here and he is all that we need. What will we do with him?

For the people around him during the Passover festival 2000 years ago, because he did not live up to their flawed expectations, they had him killed, crucified.

What are your expectations of Jesus? What will we do with him, the gift from God, the King? That is the question we need to ask ourselves, as we make our way to Easter this year.

Let's Pray

Points to Ponder

The Gift 2.0 ~ Jesus as King

Matthew 21:1-11

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Share some memories or ponderings you have about parades. Do you have any family traditions around parades? What has been your most unique parade experience? Have you ever marched in a parade? How did that differ from being a spectator?
2. What has been your understanding of this word, *Messiah*? Why was there some confusion amongst the Jewish people about whether Jesus was the Messiah?
3. Take a few moments to discuss the deeper significance of our culture's religious festivals; Christmas, Easter. What are some of the traditions you have established around these times with your family or friends? How are our rituals for these events similar or different than the Jewish festival of Passover?
4. The word *Hosanna* can be used in either crying out to God for help or praising and thanking Him for what He has done. We sing this word often in our worship songs but where else do you see *Hosanna* used in our culture?
5. Why did the crowd in Jerusalem go from shouting *Hosanna* to Jesus at the beginning of the week, to *Crucify him*, only five days later? Have you ever felt your opinion of Jesus changing like that? What caused this shift? Have you ever expected one thing from Jesus but ended up getting something else? How did you process that?

6. Jesus is a king unlike the world has ever seen. What does the Kingship of Jesus represent to your life?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray that God would reveal something new and inspiring to you about Jesus as King, Priest and Sacrifice this Easter.