

Sunday worship, Sunday, April 5
Jesus Rides
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Hi Wesley family! Today is Palm Sunday, and the beginning of Holy Week. We join together with followers of Jesus all around the world as we celebrate Jesus's final days of life on earth. In this time of physical separation due to COVID-19, I am hoping to find for some real encouragement as we join together with people all over the world in reflecting on the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Today, we are reading together from Matthew 21.

Matthew 21: 1-11 (NIV)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

"Say to Daughter Zion,
 'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
 and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

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

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Many biblical scholars and translators often refer to this passage of Scripture as The Triumphant Entry. Such a description might create an image of a conquering King returning from war and rightfully taking a seat on the throne of the kingdom. Jesus does march into Jerusalem as he prepares to return to his rightful throne in the

heavenly realm. There is a large crowd, people spread their cloths and palm branches on the ground, and the people shout chants of Hosanna. The whole city is stirred up with such a parade like when a big-time celebrity might ride into town. However, I want to focus on a different image as Jesus comes into Jerusalem. Take a look at his ride?

For us Americans, we have a love affair with our rides. Often people want a car that embodies their personality. Unfortunately that was not the case with my very first car. The first car was a 1986 Chevy Nova. It was really a gift from my friends, Ed and Claire. I bought it for \$1. It was a small car and just about every fluid in that car leaked. I drove around all the time with oil, windshield wiper fluid, brake fluid, and antifreeze in my trunk to give my car a drink whenever it needed some fluid.

When my Chevy Nova needed a new transmission, I leased my first brand new car: a 1997 Toyota Tacoma pickup truck. It was red! I loved having a pick up truck in college. The first night I had the truck, I actually slept in the bed of the truck in my sleep bag under the stars. It was so nice to be able to drive my truck out of town without the worry of it breaking down. I moved so much furniture and so many other stuff for so many people. A couple of summers ago, Kathie and I got a new truck: a 2018 Toyota Tundra. It is red, and it is big! I love cranking up the engine each time I drive it and hearing that engine roar like a lion. I have used it on mission trips and retreats to haul stuff. I have helped many Wesley people move, especially beds. It is hard to get your bed in your car, but it fits really easy in the back of my big, red truck. I love having a truck - I feel like it's the perfect ride for my personality!

In the Old Testament, God would ride into camp on a cloud. He landed on Mt. Sinai in a pillar of fire and lightning. That's what you'd expect: a powerful God riding in on power. Here comes the King!

What about Jesus? Usually He walked, and sometimes He walked in style, like when he walked on water on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a storm. But in today's Scripture, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. Not exactly the regal ride of a king! An amazing thing when you think about who Jesus is. It's a perfect picture of humility. A donkey was a burden bearing animal - the very image of a servant animal.

In the book of Philipians, the apostle Paul describes this servant nature of Jesus as one who emptied himself and took the very nature of a servant.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

The King of kings and the Lord of lords is parading into Jerusalem not as a conquering hero but as a humble servant. It's a very human image of Jesus. He is willing to empty himself and not to use his equality with God to his own advantage. This week will be full of images of Jesus washing the disciples feet, offering bread and wine as his body and blood, and being put to death on the cross. Jesus is fully committed to be obedient to God's will and direction in His life no matter what it takes.

This is the way of Jesus, and Jesus calls us to have the same mindset in our relationships with one another. In many ways, I feel like this time of physical distancing is limiting our ability to serve others. The small things that you are doing to serve people where you are right now might feel very unimportant. I love this good word from Oswald Chambers.

“The real test of a saint is not one's willingness to preach the gospel, but one's willingness to do something like washing the disciples' feet - that is, being willing to do those things that seem unimportant in human estimation but count as everything to God.” Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

What are the seemingly unimportant things you are doing? I have found myself washing lots of dishes, helping Natalie with her homework, and encouraging people to give to support Wisdom's Wellspring for Easterfest. All these things seem like very small things especially in the midst of a global pandemic, but I believe they count as everything to God. Our love for God grows deeper as we love others in what feel like the smallest of ways.

This week, we remember that Jesus gives up everything and surrenders his life on earth for us. How will you and I humble ourselves, empty ourselves, and surrender our lives so that God would resurrect us as we get ready to celebrate Easter? Let's be fully committed to God's will and direction in our lives no matter what it takes. Let's saddle up and ride with Jesus.

Let's prayer: Oh God, I can see the palm branches and hear the shouts of Hosanna as Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem. Ride into our hearts and help us to empty ourselves. Help us to value the seemingly unimportant things as you value our humble acts of service. We pray in the name of the One who has come and the One who is coming again.