

Matthew 21:1-11
The Clash of Two Kingdoms
WRCoB 4.2.23

Just when you think you know Jesus
Jesus goes and does something so out of character!

He comes to Bethphage and the Mount of Olives
Sends a couple of disciples into Jerusalem
To collect a donkey and colt

And then rides into town in the exact same way
Zechariah prophesized a king would 500 years earlier.

That is so unlike him.

It wasn't like Jesus to draw attention to himself that way!

Matthew 8:4 NLT

⁴ Then Jesus said to him, “Don’t tell anyone about this.

Matthew 9:30 NIV

³⁰ and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.”

Matthew 17:9 NIV

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

To this

Intentionally designing his own grand entrance!

It was the season of Passover,
And the city's population swelled with the pilgrimage.

Some say the population of Jerusalem grew
From 40,000 to upwards of 250,000 during Passover.

It drew Jews from all over the Mediterranean region.

Jesus calculated his entrance into the city
To be as big a spectacle as possible.

Why would he want to do that?

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A book entitled, *The Last Week*
Explains Jesus' rather out-of-character actions.

Written by Markus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.
It describes the events of the last week in Jesus' life.

The authors claim there were two parades
In Jerusalem on that day in the year 30 AD.

One was coming into the city from the east
From the direction of the Mount of Olives.

The other was coming into the city from the west
In the direction of Caesarea.

One was led by Jesus, the other Pontius Pilate.

Pilate didn't live in Jerusalem.

Like other previous governors
Pilate lived in Caesarea by the Sea

In a beautiful palace
Faraway from those troublesome Jews.

But Pilate's responsibility was to keep Pax Romana
And that meant leading a regiment to Jerusalem
During the Jewish Passover celebrations.

According to the book, *The Last Week*
These two processions happened simultaneously!

From the west, the parade of a 600 Roman soldiers
Entered with steeds and chariots
Fully armed and in full military regalia.

One can imagine how that would look and sound!

The creaking of leather
The whinnying of horses
The clanking of armour and weaponry
The glint of swords and spears.

Make no mistake, this was the army of the Roman Emperor!

And then from the east came Jesus.

Jesus. Alone. On a donkey.
As children waved palm fronds and shouted, "hosanna."

A somewhat striking contrast wouldn't you say?

Very intentional and very provocative
And very probable
Exactly what Jesus had in mind!

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Clearly, Jesus wanted to juxtapose
The violent and oppressive
Kingdom of the Roman occupation
With his kingdom

A kingdom based on God's peace and justice!

For this very purpose
Jesus imitated a scene
Out of the Book of Zechariah.

Zechariah 9:9 CEV

**⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem,
celebrate and shout!
Your king has won a victory,
and he is coming to you.
He is humble
and rides on a donkey;
he comes on the colt
of a donkey.**

Not only, but look at the details of the king's victory.

Zechariah 9:10 CEB

**¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem.
The bow used in battle will be cut off;
he will speak peace to the nations.**

**His rule will stretch from sea to sea,
and from the river to the ends of the earth.**

The audacious, symbolic entrance of Jesus
Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey
Was not lost upon them.

I am sure it infuriated the religious leaders.

It brings the whole purpose of Jesus triumphal entry
And Palm Sunday into a whole new understanding.

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I've always struggled over Palm Sunday.

It seemed so odd to me
Jesus wanted to enter Jerusalem that way.

It seemed anticlimactic
What with everything that follows.

Make no mistake
Jesus' triumphal entry was a pre-planned event.

A political/religious counter-demonstration
Contrasting the two kingdoms!

Jesus would not be the Messiah
The people of Israel had in mind.

He would not muster a militia
And try overthrow the Roman occupation
And restore Israel to its former glory!

Jesus came to instate God's kingdom
A kingdom of a completely different nature!

One parade showed a kingdom
Ruled by the spear and the sword.

The other parade, a kingdom ruled by the Prince of Peace.

Jesus meant to show the contrast between two kingdoms.

One instilled fear in the hearts of its citizens.

The other would rule in love and self-sacrifice.

Palm Sunday was the inaugural parade
Preceding the institution of God's kingdom
And the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

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If then, we are to understand that Jesus' entry into the city
Was a premeditated act meant to show the contrast
Between the two kingdoms

The rest of the week's events led to the final showdown!

From Palm Sunday and throughout the rest of the week
Jesus' actions were meant to provoke!

On Monday, in the courtyard of the temple
He overturned the tables of the money-changers
Calling it a "den of robbers."

He purposely did so to aggravate and agitate.

With Jesus' "in-your-face" actions

The plotted ways to put an end to Jesus.

On Tuesday, Jesus returned to the temple

And continued to challenge the authorities.

He gave a scathing indictment on the religious leaders

Purposely trying to incite and inflame their wrath?

The whole of Matthew 28 is devoted to Jesus' accusations.

This is just a portion of what he said.

Hypocrites, blind fools and guides, snakes, brood of vipers! You strain the gnat but swallow the camel! You clean the outside of the cup but inside is full of greed and self-indulgence! Whitewash tombs! Beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones.

On and on he taunted them.

If Jesus wasn't trying to antagonize and provoke

The religious leaders on Tuesday

If he wasn't trying to bring to light

The hypocrisy of the religious institution

If he wasn't trying to create enough of a disturbance

To cause an uprising

Then he was just out to get himself killed.

And obviously, that proved very successful.

On Wednesday, Judas agreed to betray Jesus
Much to the delight of the scribes and Pharisees.

Thursday, we find Jesus and his companions
Coming into the city from Bethany
To arrange for their Passover meal.

During the meal Jesus washed his disciples' feet
He introduced the bread and cup
As symbols of his upcoming suffering

And he prayed for his disciples
And he prayed for the world that was
And he prayed for the world that was to be.

They left the upper room and went up the Mount of Olives
And while Jesus prayed again in Gethsemane

Judas came with the authorities to arrest Jesus
And brought before the Jewish and Roman authorities

On Friday, Jesus was beaten, tortured
Mocked as "King of the Jews"
Dragged through the city streets

And nailed to a Roman cross by the Roman authorities
Thus putting an end to any possible rebellion.

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And so today, we celebrate Palm Sunday.

We celebrate it with the knowledge
That there were two triumphal entries on that day!

Pilate's display of worldly power and authority
With its threat of violent domination
It's iron-fisted rule of fear and oppression.

And the other contrasting parade
With Jesus offering an alternative vision
Of a peaceful kingdom ruled by love and mercy.

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Whose kingdom will ultimately prove victorious?

The clash of two kingdoms
One whose origins are of this world
The other whose kingdom is of another.

There on that particular Friday, overlooking the city
From the hill called Calvary stood three crosses.

From the world's perspective it had won

The leader of the insurgence dead
His disciples scattered
The rebellion crushed!

The city silent.

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But from another perspective, a very different truth emerges

The very cross which represented everything about
The Roman occupation's oppressive rule

The very cross that meant only death and destruction
To anyone who would challenge Rome!

That very cross would come to symbolize
Something so strikingly different in nature.

Victory in Jesus!

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Some questions remain.

Did Jesus go to Jerusalem specifically to die?

Or did he go to Jerusalem to start a revolution
And ended up being killed as a result?

In the Gospel of Mark, he predicted his death
Not once but three times.

Mark 8:31 NRSVUE

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

There is no mistake
Jesus knew his actions would cause his death.

He made sure of that with his many provocations.

He knew.

And the final question.

Why did Jesus have to die?

From the Roman authorities
And Jewish council's perspective

Jesus needed to die because
He was a political and religious troublemaker

But beyond that
And beyond the countless other crucifixions
That took place under Pax Romana

Jesus's death was part of a greater divine action.

Jesus died to save humankind.

Hard to wrap your head around it?
Sure it is.

But at the heart of the Christian faith
The death and resurrection of Jesus restored
Our broken relationships with God.

This is spelled out in the theological word created

AT-ONE-MENT

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 CEV

¹⁸ God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between [God] and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.

¹⁹ What we mean is that God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And

he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace.

I cannot believe Jesus' death was just an unfortunate end
To a wonderful teacher and prophet.

Jesus spoke of his impending death
And the necessity of it.

If Jesus said that
That's good enough for me.

The clash of two kingdoms

Which will be victorious?

Well, we already know the answer to that question!

Praise be to God!