

Theme: Behold your King! (29/3/26)

Text: Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday is remembered by many Christians as the last Sunday of Jesus on earth. The Lectionary Bible readings tell us that today is a joined Sunday: *Palm* and *Passion*. That reminds us of the contrast of the mood between the triumph of Palm and the tragedy of Passion – ‘the cheers’ of the Palm Sunday and ‘the tears’ of the cross at Calvary.

Palm Sunday also marks the beginning of the Holy Week, the final week of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus knew that His visit to Jerusalem will be His last. Where He, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leaders of the Jews and condemn Him to death (Mat 20:17ff). Jesus predicts this to His disciples again and again to prepare them for this moment. So, Jesus plans His final week to include a royal visit to Jerusalem, the City of God.

It is interesting to hear how Kings and Queens plan their visits. We heard about the recent visit of King Fredrick of Denmark and Queen Mary to Tasmania. The first visit to Australia of King Charles as sovereign and Queen Camilla in October 2024 with all that was involved in the preparation by the government and the community. But there was nothing compared to this royal visit of Jesus the King of Kings. It was the last chance for Jesus to expose visibly and publicly who He is and why He had to come.

1. The preparation (1-3)

Here comes the time for Jesus not just for words – teachings and preachings, but the time for action. We often hear Jesus in His healing ministry throughout the gospels warning those He healed not to tell anyone. Mark’s gospel makes it clear that Jesus was a hidden Messiah (Christ) until His time comes to fulfill all prophecies and complete His redemption work on the cross. So, this is not the time to hide or keep His identity and authority in secret. Matthew tells us of Jesus’ divine ability to predict things before they happen.

We are told of large crowds following Jesus and His disciples from Jericho, after healing two blind persons there. And as they approached Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead and instructed them: ²*Go to the village ahead...you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.* ³*If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them.*

Two things we may need to take note in these verses: i) *The divine authority of Jesus*; ii) *Jesus' identity in Matthew's writing*.

First, The divine authority of Jesus. Jesus commands 2 of His disciples – “Go to the village ahead of you” This is not a request or suggestion which offers a choice, but a command which is non-negotiable. It requires immediate obedience. And ²*you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.* ³*If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them.* Obviously, Jesus speaks with authority which only a prophet could do. This is exactly what we find in the testimony of the Samaritan woman at the well. When Jesus revealed to her the secret of her marriage life (Jn 4:19). Then she exclaimed ‘I can see that you are a prophet’ (Jn 4:19). It is also not surprising for the crowds who followed Jesus into Jerusalem to say that too, to the citizens of Jerusalem when they asked, ¹⁰*‘Who is this?’* ¹¹*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.*

The interesting thing we can witness at this point is that Jesus is more and greater than a prophet. How would we know that? Because unlike the prophets of old, Jesus does not have to enquire about the will of God whether to send the disciples or not. Jesus did not pray to the Father to give Him the power or knowledge before He sent the disciples. Jesus' time has come to honour the Father even at His final journey to the cross.

Friends, is this the kind of King you are waiting for? Is this the kind of King you want to know and to obey? Is He the kind of King you cheerfully acknowledge in good times and tough times, on the road to Jerusalem and on the way to the cross? If you haven't welcomed Him yet, think and pray about it. Welcome Him into your life today. And if you have welcomed Him, listen to His voice daily in His Word and make Him known to your loved ones and neighbours.

Second, Jesus' identity in Matthew's writing. As we know from our study of his gospel, Matthew is more Jewish than any other gospel writers (Mark, Luke and John). This means Matthew sees Jesus more from the light of the OT. In his genealogy, Matthew links Jesus back to David, Moses and Abraham, and He is the fulfillment of all prophecies. Look with me again to verses 2 and 3 where Matthew mentioned two donkeys – *‘a donkey with her colt’* and again in verses 7, *‘they brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on both of them.’*

Matthew is the only one who mentioned two donkeys. None of the other gospel writers, not even Zechariah. Zechariah 9:9 only mentioned 'a donkey.' So, why only Matthew insists of having two donkeys in the story? Why are there two donkeys? Why does Jesus enter Jerusalem seated on a donkey and her colt? It doesn't make sense.

However, in order to understand Matthew's point, we have to go right back to Genesis 49. Just as Zechariah had said, 'your king comes to you' (this king who comes on both the colt and the donkey) it was the fulfillment of a blessing given long ago to Judah which now enacts as Jesus (Son of David) enters Jerusalem. So, let not Matthew's point confuse with other gospels but affirm the long-expected King of Israel and our King eternal.

Friends, we're more privileged than the disciples to see how this particular event fits-in into the big picture of God's plan for Jesus our King and Saviour. It is a joy and delight to witness what Jesus could do with us in our ordinary daily routine – like the willingness hearts of the disciples and the owner of the Donkey, we must make ourselves and our possessions available for Jesus. He sends the disciples to bring the donkey, and if anyone says something to you tell them ***'The Lord needs them.'***

Again, it is an honour to tell others that 'the Lord needs them' too. You can make this a part of your 2026's resolutions: to mark a non-Christian friend or someone among your relatives or someone close to you. Pray for that person and keep reminding him or her – the Lord needs him or her, not because the Lord is desperate for volunteers, but because He loves you. He wants your willing spirit and generous giving. So, are you willing to release and let go of your possessions, of your times, your gifts and skills to advance the gospel ministry? Do not keep pushing back. Do it today.

2. The prophecy (4-7)

Jesus knows that He came to fulfill what the prophet had called the City of Jerusalem for: "Say to the daughter of Zion, see, your king comes to you" (Zech 9:9). The prophet Zechariah talks about the people of Jerusalem. The name "Zion" is often referred to a hill (fortress) in Jerusalem captured by king David, and often called the City of David. Over time the term expands to symbolize the entire City of Jerusalem.

Friends, the privilege and the promise of the coming King is now ours, let Jesus take the throne of your heart if you haven't done it. Let him take the driver's seat in your life, guard and order your every step. The Church is the new Israel/people of God in Christ. The Apostle Paul makes it plain that 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ' (Eph 1:3). Jesus is coming to reign in and among us who claim to be members of His Church family.

Jesus shows us His perfect obedience to His Father's plan for our salvation through His suffering and death. He never doubts or fails to obey His Father's will. In fact, this is the very ground where the devil tested Him in the desert after His baptism. This was in order to show that Jesus could perform miracles on His own accord and glory. Again, the Apostle Paul states it bluntly that Christ Jesus, 'who in the nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Phil 2:6-8). Humility is an essential mark of discipleship modelled by Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father. Let us adopt this divine attribute with God's help to submit our hearts totally for Christ's reign, and for us to acknowledge our limitations and dependence upon His grace.

3. The procession (8-11)

The expectations were shifted. The crowds lay down their cloaks and branches like the red carpet or tapa cloths (ngatu in Tonga) to mark the royal parade. Obviously, the signs of surrender and praise among the crowds were publicly demonstrated and the swing of celebration was high. It raises the event to the point of stirring up Jerusalem – 'the whole city was stirred' (10). It was out of disbelief and curiosity came the question: "Who is this?" Matthew indicates the point that the whole city was stirred in disbelief, so as the whole crowds was loud in praise – ⁹*"the crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Hosanna means 'save now, please deliver us, or save, I pray.'* We should remember this to be our prayers and praise, that Jesus the Son of David our King will save us without delay. And it must be our prayers also for the war in the Middle East and Europe that humility and peace are the very nature of His coming to Zion.

We cannot ignore or turn a blind eye to the tragic irony – that the same crowds who praised Jesus on the Palm Sunday, also shouted for His death. What does this tell us about the world which Jesus came to save? What does it tell us about our discipleship?

How easy to be distracted by the world news, politics in the workplace and schools. How easy to be anxious about health issues and our financial situations. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will help us to stay alert and focus on Jesus our King. And without fail to see Him at work in bringing new converts daily into His Kingdom through sharing the gospel of our suffering and Servant King.

Two simple messages to take home – continue to reflect and pray over them during this Holy Week: i) True worship is not just an emotional shout or hosanna! It's not merely joining other family members and friends to sing and praise God on the Sundays. But worship is a life laid down as the crowds of the first Palm Sunday, who laid down their cloaks and branches. Worship is about submitting ourselves daily, submitting our plans, our thoughts, and our services at the feet of Jesus.

ii) Note the line – *'the whole city was stirred'* (it implies the power of an earthquake). Jesus' coming and His dwelling in the throne of our hearts should shake up the foundations of our lives, affect every part of us, transform the way we think and conduct ourselves and sanctify us to be more and more like Jesus our Lord and King. Friends, Jesus is still making His entry today – inviting you and I to recognise Him not just a prophet and historical figure; not just on the road to Jerusalem but on the way to the cross. Recognize and welcome Jesus daily into our lives as our eternal Lord and King. Pray with me!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, King of glory, dominion and power. Rule from the throne of our hearts we ask. And make us the instruments of your peace and love to our neighbour and our world, today and always. In your might name we pray. Amen.*