

**Homily**  
**McCarter Presbyterian Church**  
***Palm Sunday***  
*6th Sunday in Lent*  
04-05-20

**Old Testament Scripture**

Zechariah 9:9-10

**New Testament Scripture**

Matthew 21:1-11      NRSV

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt,  
the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”  
The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Palms and Pathways**

If you are interested in becoming an **ordained pastor** in the Presbyterian church, you have a long and thorough process to go through. Early on, the inquirer, as they are termed, will hear something like this:

“What is your call?”

“What do you view as your ministry?”

I always had a good response for such questions, calling on my years as a surgeon: taking care of all sorts of people in **every aspect of living** from newborns to the athlete to those dying in the ICU. I also had significant moments of **seeing God** at work in my home church, Westminster Presbyterian here in Greenville. And, even more dramatically when I went on my three trips to the Dominican Republic just prior to starting this journey, which placed me here as your pastor. It has been quite **a ride!**

But, when I was asked where I thought my call would lie sometime in the future, I had to stop and think. **Medical missions** was suggested by one committee member. Perhaps, I would serve in missions administration or in training others, especially non-medical volunteers and staff, preparing them for their call in mission work.

Of course, the entire **process for training pastors** in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is very intentional, as it should be. All of this concentrated activity is **led by the Holy Spirit**, and that kind of language saturates these types of conversations. But, here are the stark guidelines for the committee that supervises this process in each presbytery:

- You can do **ministry** without being ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.
- You were probably doing ministry with the **simplest activity** on any given day, whether you recognize it or not.
- **God is doing the calling.** Other folks will just have to get used to the change.

I think this last one is where we find **Jesus** in our scripture lesson from *Matthew* this morning. He has been telling his disciples and many others for nearly all of the previous nineteen chapters in this gospel! He has a clear idea of **God's claim** on his life. And, it is a terrible and demanding call indeed. Jesus, **fully human and fully divine**, will suffer and die. There is a lot more that follows his death, thankfully. But, Jesus had a very human body, and he experienced all that **insult, injury, misery, and torture** just as you and I would.

So, now we have the **triumphal entry** of Jesus into Jerusalem. From a point outside the town, down by the west wall of the city, Jesus proceeded down this pathway, both literally and as a figure of speech. At this point, his **sense of call** was not a problem. And, judging by the descriptions of the crowd in our scripture lesson, everyone else could see it, as well. Whether he was perceived as a **political figure**, a royal king **crowned by God**, or the **Messiah** promised in scripture, he had come to Jerusalem with **purpose and passion**.

Now, if you like to dig for details, you should like today's scripture lesson. It one of the rare occasions where the descriptions are **nearly alike** in all four Gospels. Most of the crowd was looking for a **secular leader**. But, Jesus of Nazareth had a firm idea of what he needed to do. His statements and his riding a donkey all blend into a pattern of **intentional activity**, previously identified in the **Hebrew scriptures**.

This **path** he was on was **intentional**, as well. Scholars feel that the crowd was hoping that Jesus would turn right and take the crowd into **the praesidium**, the Roman provincial seat and fortress, and perform a mighty act to overthrow and disarm the **hated Romans**. Those Zealots in the crowd wanted an act of war and an **act of God!** But, when Jesus turned into the city and went immediately to **the temple mount**, the crowd that wanted a big event, a political upheaval, or a confrontation with the authorities must have been **disappointed**. In the *Gospel of Mark*, Jesus and the disciples are left **alone at the temple doors**. They look around, and then they go back **out of the city** again, unaccompanied by anyone.

No matter how the procession ended, we realize that this spectacle of coming into the city and the cloaks and the tree branches and the adulation were **only the beginning**. That part we understand and celebrate. But, on this particular Sunday we often make a **big mistake**: We play down what follows this day. Within a week, Jesus is arrested, tortured, tried, and **executed** in the most cruel way possible. This was an amazing **sacrifice** that Jesus made for each one of us. But, that is not the end of the story. **Jesus is raised by God** and ascends to **rule with God**. And, we have **God's Spirit** to remain with us. So truly, the story does not end at the cross: It is the **Great Beginning**.

And, our celebration of the **Eucharist** today is part of that. You see, the Eucharist, literally translated from the Greek, is **the good gift**. And, it keeps on giving because **Jesus Christ** is risen and **reigns in power** for each one of us. I am so pleased that we are able to celebrate this good gift with you all today. It is the reminder that **God sent Jesus** for a special purpose: God sent Jesus **for you and me**. God sent Jesus so that **we might live!**

And, now in **the season of Lent**, it is that celebration day. The tree branches, palms, and the crowd were one thing. But, Jesus kept to his path, the **difficult path** that led away from confrontation and political power to the center of Jewish worship at **the temple** and the people who surrounded it and worshiped there. On that day we now call **Palm Sunday**, a crowd was **welcoming Jesus**, who seemed to most of them an exceptional human being. Indeed, he was the King of Kings. We all might shout with the crowd:

“Welcome Jesus. **Welcome, King of Kings!**”

But, let us also say, “**Thank you, God!**”, for sending this One down **this path** as **the Christ**, who came for each one of us.

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