

“Carrying Christ Into the World”

Philippians 2:5-11 & Matthew 21:1-11

Pastor James York

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One of the many blessings of being around young children is seeing the familiar for the first time again through their senses. A mere stroll across the yard can be a fascinating adventure. Feeling the texture of grass. Blowing the seeds of a dandelion into flight. Watching squirrels gather and store their food. Dancing to the song of a bird. Smelling the rich aroma of a flower. Savoring a wild strawberry. Imagining the clouds are an array of people, things, and symbols.

Most of us are very familiar with the account of Jesus triumphant entry and the Easter story. This holy week I invite you to use all your senses, your imagination, and your heart to discover again. None of the people that witnessed first hand the passion of Jesus fully understood the new thing that God was doing. No one has a full understanding of the glory of God’s saving love.

C.S. Lewis invites us to discover something new every holy week. Lewis wrote; “Now the Christian belief is that if we somehow share the humility and suffering of Christ we shall also share in His conquest of death and find a new life after we have died and in it become perfect and perfectly happy creatures. This means something much more than our trying to follow his teaching. In Christ a new kind of person appeared and the new kind of life which began in Jesus is to be put in us.”

With our scripture as our guide let us explore and imagine. Let’s look for connection points and discover again the new and glorious things that God was, is, and will continue to do.

Matthew 21:1-3 (MSG) “When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: “Go over to the village across from you. You’ll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you’re doing, say, ‘The Master needs them!’ He will send them with you.” This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet: Tell Zion’s daughter, “Look, your king’s on his way, poised and ready, mounted On a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal.” The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David’s son!” “Blessed is he who comes in God’s name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!” As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, “What’s going on here? Who is this?” The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The shouts of the crowd first reach our ears. They cry Hosanna! A plea used to address a king or God meaning help or save, I pray. As we reach the outskirts of town we notice the crowd waving palm branches and laying down their garments welcoming Jesus. Some of the crowd has come seeking healing, for the stories of Jesus healing preceded him. Others are hoping for deliverance from the oppression of the Romans. Jesus could be a great earthly king. They have heard how Jesus calmed a storm, walked on water, and controlled entire herds of animals. Certainly Jesus could defeat the Romans and any enemy. Jerusalem will surely be a great

political power. Still others are physically hungry. They have heard how Jesus fed thousands of people with food left over. How wonderful it will be to live in Jerusalem for Jesus will provide all of one's physical needs in abundance. They dream of free meals with no need to work or cook. Some in the crowd have a spiritual hunger and long to hear the teachings of Jesus. Others seek wisdom they want to hear another one of those mysterious parables that reveals great truth. While the crowd had gathered for many reasons, they marvel upon the sight of Jesus for there is an aura around him as he exudes extravagant love. They feel this wonderful love--a love that was new and different from anything they had experienced before.

For the first time we get a glimpse of Jesus riding on a donkey. Since you are a great reader of the Bible, you immediately realize that this fulfills prophecy of Zechariah and Isaiah concerning the arrival of the Messiah--Israel's messianic king. Solomon, David's original son rode into town on a donkey at his coronation. Would Jesus exercise his right to his earthly throne?

Behind you, you hear someone shout, "We must get rid of him." You spin around and see a group of Pharisees. They worked so hard on fulfilling the letter of the law but never let their hearts be softened by love. They taught the Old Testament, cared for the temple, and did the priestly duties. They tried so hard to protect and shield the Israelites from the surrounding culture. They must get rid of Jesus and his new ideas, teachings, and insights for they must preserve the temple, their beliefs, and shelter the faithful remnant. Jesus loves everyone. Jesus is forgiving everyone. If they embrace Jesus and his radical grace, soon everyone will be united in harmony at temple. It will be chaos. There is not enough room to let everyone in. It never occurs to them that God might be doing something new.

Not far from the Pharisees you see and hear a group of Roman soldiers. "When will these people ever learn that the Roman Empire is in control? If they would just become civilized like us, follow our decent and orderly laws, join in our community building projects, and work for a better tomorrow. There is no need for God. We have the power to make earth a civilized place ourselves."

One of Jesus' disciples asks you to clear the path for Jesus. These disciples were a strange lot. Yesterday they were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom and today they faithfully follow Jesus. The boldest was Peter who pledged his loyalty to Jesus. You wonder if he really will betray Jesus as Jesus has predicted. And what about the rest of the disciples? Today they stand with Jesus but will they in the future when the Pharisees and Romans confront Jesus.

Your eyes meet Jesus' eyes. You see that he is weeping. Jesus is greatly disturbed by the powers that destroy life. Jesus has great compassion for all people. Jesus sees his loved ones in bondage and knows what it will take to set them free. Why do so many choose hate over love? Why can't the people see, understand, and experience the new way in which God will love them and save them. Why can't they sense God's love for every person?

Pastor Karen Pidcock-Lester wrote, "When God delays, or does not remove our pain, God weeps. Not because God can do nothing, but because God wants to do everything. God weeps, not because God is weak and cannot help, but because God is strong enough to resist the joy of one moment in order to do what will bring joy most fully, most gloriously for all people in all times."

Jesus is about to do something new to set people free, to give people new life; but in order for Jesus to set the world free, he must conquer death. The time of his passion is at hand, so

Jesus out of his great love for everyone, sets his face like flint and continues his work of saving the world.

Who should our role model be in this story? Not the crowd, they are looking for someone to meet their needs and solve their problems. They want a quick fix and an easier life. They are curious but not committed. Their loyalties are easily bought and sold. Their shouts of Hosanna today will turn to “Crucify Him” on Thursday. New Testament scholar Eugene Boring points out that “the members of the crowd know the truth about Jesus but they cannot bring themselves to *do* the truth. They are like college students who make an A in a course on ethics ... but still flunk life.” They are oblivious to the new life Jesus was bringing.

The Pharisees are not an attractive role model. They are having an identity crisis. They are putting everything on the line to protect tradition in a changing world. They are obsessed with preserving what they have left, as they long for the good old days. They are so wrapped up in preservation that they are blind to the new life Jesus was bringing.

On the surface it seems as if the disciples would be our best choice for a role model after all they are serving Jesus. However, in a matter of days all of them will deny and betray Jesus. The disciples are shaking in their sandals. This whole trip to Jerusalem has them nervous, with Jesus talking about death and suffering. The disciples have seen Jesus do the miraculous, and they have done wonderful ministry. All of them will betray Jesus. Most of us can relate with the disciples. Some of us have made it to the cross. Some of us have endured the pains of suffering. Some of us have areas where we refuse to follow Jesus. Some of us when we see Jesus leading us into a storm take a different path. Certainly the disciples in a couple of weeks, after they experienced new life from the resurrection and are filled with the Holy Spirit are excellent role models but not this week. Their faith is divided between Jesus and saving their own skin.

Perhaps the donkey is our best role model. It is the donkey who carries Christ into the world just as we are commissioned to carry Christ into the world. The donkey was serving Jesus. We are to serve Jesus humbly and give the glory to God. The donkey followed Jesus’ direction and was willing to go where Jesus wanted to go not where he wanted to go. The donkey was not spooked by the crowds, the noise, or the attention and continued on carrying Jesus into hostile territory. The donkey did not try to buck Jesus off his back, rather he was obedient to the will of Jesus who held the reins.

How are we to carry Christ into the world? It all begins with love. In the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the dying professor states; “The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love and to let love come in.” This holy week let the love of God come into your life. Open yourself. Use all your senses. Discover anew just how much you are loved as Jesus freely died to set you free, to give you a new life, and to fill you with love. Let love come in. Then learn how to give love out. Carry the love of Christ wherever you go and freely give love out in all your relationships.

Failure to let love come in and to give love out is hell. Love is risky. C.S. Lewis wrote “to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, miserable.”

Carry Christ into the world by risking everything to give and receive love. The Apostle Paul wrote. **Philippians 2:5-11 (MSG)** “**Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of**

himself. Jesus had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, Jesus set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a servant, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. Jesus didn't claim special privileges. Instead, Jesus lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted Jesus high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that Jesus is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”

Be bold! Risk everything to love! God's love sets us free and gives us abundant life. Share joy, life, and love with everyone. Carry Christ into the world. Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevering in prayer. Love God. Love your neighbors. Love your enemies. If your life is in turmoil like Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, cling to God's steadfast everlasting resurrecting love. If you are weeping like Jesus, know that Jesus will personally lovingly wipe away every tear. If people ask you, "Who is this Jesus?", then love them in a way that reveals Jesus. Show them the way to everlasting peace, joy, life, and love. Discover again, or for the first time, the joy of carrying Christ into the world. You are the next chapter of God's love story. Experience the glory of singing and hearing hosannas. The thrill and challenge of following Jesus. The confusion and hope of God promises. The excitement and bewilderment of resurrection. Open yourself to receive love. Share love. Carry Christ into the world. Amen