

April 12 & 13, 2025

Palm Sunday: *Enter*

Exodus 40:34-38, Luke 19:29-44

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Palm Sunday, a day that places us at the beginning of Holy Week. It sets the narrative for the last, final days to come. It represents Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem at the top of the Mount of Olives processing through the city on a donkey leading us into his final week and days which then will take us through the stages of the cross known in the Holy Land as the *via dolorosa*. Many churches, much like ours, will process around waving palms, shouting Hosanna. However, there is so much more to this story than what we like to reenact on Palm Sunday. So, I want to shed light on the details often overlooked in our texts for today starting with Exodus.

God enters.

There are moments in life so sacred that it's as if a cloud descends and displaces our excuses and indifference, when our experience outstrips our words and our feelings penetrate far beyond the limits of our comprehension. Within that swirling haze, dispassionate analysis retreats and only pure presence remains. These clouded moments dull our thinking minds while peeling back the layers of our calloused hearts. Such moments are so real and so raw that they can only be witnessed, not described.

Moses and the Israelites have built an elaborate and beautiful set of structures in which Jewish values could be enacted, where priests and Levites could process offerings from the people and, in burning or waving them, renew the popular sense of God's intimacy and achieve atonement. Threads of vibrant blue, purple, red and gold created pulsing tapestries that could hold the diverse emotions of the pilgrims and penitents.

But God was not in the tent. The sharp focus on weaves and altars and gold surfaces so captured

the attention that it occluded the inner eye. That inner vision needed a veil to diminish the impact of the world on our senses. It needed a cloud.

And the people got one.

Some things we see with our eyes wide open. But the really important things, we only see with our eyes shut. The presence of the cloud allowed Moses to focus on the divine, rather than be captive to the spellbinding colors and contours of the fabrics and the metal. It was the shimmering fog that let Moses intuit what can only be felt, beyond words or concepts, a presence that can only be lived.

That is what is happening with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Our minds go straight to the things that seem odd or not right that we miss key parts of what the story is telling us.

"When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.' ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' ³⁴ They said, 'The Lord needs it.' ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop."

⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

A donkey. An unlikely, unroyal, pristine animal to choose to ride into the city of Jerusalem. Especially, when the Roman leaders are entering into the opposite side of the city. Why do we tend to gloss over the significance of the donkey in this processional?

A book of poems about donkeys, The Donkey Elegies, closely examines an animal’s history, tracing how donkeys hauled the stones that built our civilizations, plowed the fields that fed generations, and carted soldiers and weapons from war to war. The poems undo the brunt end of every lewd joke and unearth the sacred origins of a creature we rarely consider except as a melancholy cartoon or dumb, stubborn brute.

It, perhaps, 'is not the animal itself but the animal they see, not the animal they know but the animal they think.” I will admit, I never really thought too much about donkeys, have you? Because donkeys, especially in this palm parade, will present a new way of seeing to you. Because donkeys aren’t like the children’s book, the wonky donkey, they haul steadily onward, tender and tough, lit with the knowledge that holiness dwells in the common, the low-life, the baseborn. The decision to ride a donkey as king provides visibility and voice to an age-old beast of burden that many of society’s outcasts can relate to.

But why? Why are they outcasts? Donkeys have been present at humanity’s lynchpin moments: most notably, to carry a savior to his birth and, ultimately, to his death. Do we dismiss sturdy useful beings because we have a difficult time living into what we’re afraid we’ll become? Does following Jesus into Jerusalem open our hearts to what type of God enters into our lives and calls us to do and be?

Hosanna. When we stop crying that out, the stones will continue shouting. Physicist Carlo Rovelli defines a stone as a “complex vibration of quantum fields, a momentary interaction of

forces, a process that for a brief moment manages to keep its shape, to hold itself in equilibrium before disintegrating again into dust...”

The entire evolution of science would suggest that the best grammar for thinking about the world is that of change, not of permanence. Not of being, but of becoming.” The world is made up of a network of events. A stone is an event, just like a song is an event. As permanent and unchanging as a rock looks, this is an illusion.

As far as rocks singing, there are places in the world where you can go to hear stone songs. In the Grand Staircase/Escalante National Monument in Utah, there are stones known as shaman stones, iron-oxide concretions that ring when they are tapped together like nature’s own musical instruments.

The tall, thin spires in Bryce Canyon, known as hoodoos, also sing as the wind moves around and through them.

At a deeper level, scientists put a seismometer on top of Castleton Tower near Moab, Utah so they could listen to the hum of the rock as it absorbed vibrations from the faraway ocean, from deep within the earth, even from human traffic.

So, if stones sing, what are they singing?

We would hear perhaps the resonance of the prophet Isaiah, “The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of God stands forever.” So, if it is a rock that Jesus calls our attention to, maybe it is to another kind of being, an almost-forever kind of thing. The passage calls our attention to a kind of song that is more lasting than human songs, more permanent than human power and the threats of government. Jesus’ words draw our attention to deeper vibrations.

A biologist and botanist, Robin Kimmerer, tells us something else that rocks sing about. “We are all bound,” she writes, “This is the song of rocks: making, unmaking, and making again the earth.

A way of being that is always already in process. And when the world goes silent at the foot of the cross, this Stone will cry out—the cornerstone of peace in heaven and our call to peace on earth.

So, what was happening on that cloak-strewn road into Jerusalem, down from the Mount of Olives? I think Jesus' reference to the stones suggests that becoming was happening. The making, unmaking, and remaking of the world. The stones know that better than anyone else. For a moment, the crowd is tuned in and has joined the song of covenant reciprocity and praise that has been sung down through the ages.

God has not given up on God's people. God enters into our world, into our lives. This is the proclamation at the heart of Palm Sunday. This is where we enter this Holy Week with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. An entry that is royal, triumphant, but we know how the people will turn against Jesus. We know that many in the crowds who hail Jesus as king on this Sunday will be crying out for his crucifixion by Friday. Perhaps they expected a mighty warrior-king who would drive out the Romans. Seeing Jesus held by Roman soldiers, weak and vulnerable, they will decide that he is not the king they want after all. In fact, supporting him could be downright dangerous.

Because we will no longer just see a stubborn, short donkey, but one that is wrapped in holiness preparing the way for Jesus to show us what peace on earth feels like. We will no longer be able to see the world, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the horrible events that follow the same way because God has entered in and provided a cloud for us to see just how deep God's is for us and in that cloud, we encounter what is truly divine. When we try to turn away from the needs of the world and what Christ is calling us to do, when we try to get out of the cloud that God provides for us, the stones will sing out reminding us.