

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
March 29, 2026  
Matthew 21:1-11

*The Path to Repair and Restoration: Proclaim the One Who Comes in the Name of the Lord*

Our scripture this morning is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem from the Gospel of Matthew, 21:1-11.

When they – that is Jesus and his disciples - 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:

“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.”

**The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

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The Sunday before Easter can be challenging Sunday for preachers, and not just because it is the beginning of a busy week. In the three-year cycle of scriptures, the Revised Common Lectionary, we often use for worship, there are four readings for each Sunday in the season of Advent through Pentecost. It gets a little more complicated in the season of Ordinary Time, but for each Sunday from the first Sunday in Advent to Pentecost, there is a reading from the Psalms, an Old Testament passage, a New Testament reading from Acts or one of the letters or epistles, and one Gospel reading. There is one exception to this rule and it is the Sunday before Easter, where preachers have a choice. Is this going to be Palm Sunday, where we hear the triumphal entry or Passion Sunday, where the whole Passion narrative is read – from the triumphal entry to Jesus' death on the cross? In some Christian traditions, the denomination makes the decision for you. Following Vatican II, the Catholic Church combined the texts into one, officially titled "Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032926.cfm>

There are debates amongst preachers and scholars about which approach is correct or more faithful – some of these debates get quite heated – with both sides coming down on the side of being the “purists,” with the other side caving into logistics and the modern world. From a theological stance, those arguing for the purity of the Palm Sunday narrative argue that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem should be allowed to stand on its own as a reflection of the culmination of Jesus’ ministry. And that it takes it takes away from services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to have those passages mashed in with Palm Sunday. The movements require time and space to be felt and understood in their context and so letting them play out over the course of a week reflects the rhythm of the events that unfolded. Those who argue for reading the Passion argue that to appreciate the triumphal entry, you have to hear it in contrast to the crucifixion, highlighting the reality that the same crowd cheering “Hosanna” soon shouted “Crucify him”.

Then there are the logistical arguments...those who say that whole Passion narrative should be read on Palm Sunday argue that many people skip Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and go from Hosanna to Alleluia, without considering the betrayal and arrest of Jesus after he dined with his disciples at the Last Supper or the walk to the cross and crucifixion on Good Friday. And that the real reason for not reading the full Passion narrative is that pastors don’t want to have read such a long passage of scripture on this Sunday. On the other side, those who say “Palm Sunday only” argue that the other side is giving too little credit to faithful. Many do attend Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and even if they don’t, Easter Sunday sermons reflect what happened in between. After all why is there an “empty tomb.” I think there is a bit of truth in all of these statements.

We have done both options here at PCO. Last year in 2025, we heard the triumphal entry – Palm Sunday. In 2024 we heard the full passion narrative. Both were from Luke’s Gospel. So as I sat with the scriptures this year, trying to decide which way to go, and acknowledging this week is Spring Break for many, I came across a question that swayed me to focus on Palm Sunday this year.

The question was posed in response to a commentary about our Matthew text, specifically related to the argument that to appreciate the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, you have to hear it in contrast to the crucifixion, highlighting the reality that the same crowd cheering “Hosanna” soon shouted “Crucify him”. The person asked: “Why do we assume that the crowd that welcomed Jesus and the crowd that jeered him on Good Friday was the same crowd? Do the texts say so?” The questioner gave this illustration as an example: “I’m wondering because of an insight from the story of Lincoln’s visit to Richmond the day after it fell: as soon as Lincoln stepped on Rockets wharf, Black people recognized him, and came running by the hundreds, yelling and singing and praising Lincoln and God. Few White [people] were out. For the enslaved, the Jubilee had come! Black papers reported this; white papers I believe ignored it. So what if those who similarly welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem were also those from the bottom ranks - people who were not welcome in the centers of power of

the Temple precincts and the Roman government, but ignored and unnoticed? And what if those who came to see Jesus tried before Pilate were from the more “respectable” and supporters of the status quo?<sup>2</sup>

The author of commentary shared that it could be and that “the texts are silent about the makeup of these crowds, and so they’re open to [that] kind of reading,” although “the fact that the respective stories simply say, “the crowd” and “the crowds” suggests that, on balance, the reader/listener is supposed to think of these groups as more-or-less equivalent or comparable.” But let’s stick with the questioner’s interpretation for a moment, what if they were different crowds?

In their book *The Last Week. A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem*, Biblical scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan write about two very different processions that entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30, at the beginning of the week of Passover, the most sacred week of the Jewish year. They say:

One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class. ...

On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor . . . entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus’s procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate’s proclaimed the power of empire. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus’s crucifixion.”<sup>3</sup>

Two processions... two proclamations...two messages. Pilate and his troops had come to Jerusalem to reinforce the Roman garrison permanently stationed in Jerusalem. You see Pilate didn’t live in dusty, insular Jerusalem. No, his villa was on the water – in Caesarea Maritima, “Caesarea on the Sea” some 60 miles away. Like other Roman governors, he would come to the “city” during religious festivals – not to observe the holidays from a religious perspective, but rather in case there was trouble. After all the Passover celebrated the exodus from Egypt, freedom from oppression; freedom to worship the Lord God as King and not the king of Egypt, Pharaoh. No more doing Pharaoh’s bidding; no more being forced to build grand buildings in honor of gods you don’t worship. No more. The Passover festival was recognition that the God the Hebrew people worshipped would deliver them from forces that kept them down.

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<sup>2</sup> Comment section from Salt Project. Palms and Passion Commentary. <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/3/29/palms-and-passion-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-palmpassion-sunday>

<sup>3</sup>Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week. A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem*. Harper’s San Francisco, 2006 p2

And here was Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, parading into Jerusalem the week of this most sacred festival. Borg and Crossan describe his procession this way, “A visual panoply of imperial power: calvary on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful.”<sup>4</sup>

And Matthew describes Jesus procession this way... the disciples 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!”

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! To proclaim that one was coming in the name of the Lord was no small matter. The crowds initially interpret Jesus as a king, laying coats as they quote from the prophet Zechariah 9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

But we see Jesus flipping and redefining the definition of a king. Here is a “king” on a donkey, not a warhorse, declaring peace, forgiveness, and grace to all, not domination. Now there were political consequences, even if Jesus was not seen as a king in the conventional sense. While the kingdom Jesus spoke so much about was not a geopolitical military threat to the Romans, all of this talk of a kingdom that is small but powerful, like a mustard seed or a bit of yeast, a kingdom which belongs to children and those on the outside looking in; a kingdom where peace and justice and mercy reign. Yes, this redefinition of kingship had consequences. And it wasn’t just kingship, it was the whole notion of peace. After all Jesus was living in the time of the Pax Romana – the Roman peace – through imperial power, peace existed throughout the Roman Empire. Through imperial power.

Although Pilate was a regional governor and not the emperor, he represented the empire, an empire where the emperor was not just a ruler, but also understood to be the Son of God. As Borg and Crossan note, this was not just a rival social order, but also a rival theology. To proclaim that Jesus is *the One Who Comes in the Name of the Lord* is to say that the God – the Lord who has sent Jesus has the last word. The Roman emperors and their empire will end. The powers and principalities keeping the people shackled to poverty, keeping them

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid p3

from accessing the healing they need to live full lives, keeping them from truly welcoming and loving their neighbors, they will eventually be conquered by the God of love. The crowds in Jerusalem had a choice. Would they bow down for the representative of the Empire full of pomp and circumstance or would they wave palms at the one entering in humility on a donkey? They had a choice which procession will they follow. We likewise have a choice.

This afternoon some of us will be participating in the Path to Palm Sunday procession which will culminate with worship, music and proclamation at the State Capitol. As part of the activities, the leadership is inviting everyone to carry the spirit of Palm Sunday beyond this day, through a *Palm Sunday Promise*. They share that this promise is “for those who will be with us in Lansing and for those who will be praying along with us from across the state. For those in the pews and those outside them. For anyone who believes that the values of compassion, justice, and welcome are too important to set down.”<sup>5</sup> I want to end this morning with the promise and I invite you to share this promise with others. I have included it as the items for our work in repair and restoration for this sixth week of Lent:

The Promise asks three things of each of us: **Pray. Learn. Act.**

**I will pray** for healing and justice in my community, in America and the world.

**I will learn** about how today’s issues affect the county where I live.

**I will act** to serve God and my neighbor and to strengthen democracy.

On Palm Sunday we remember that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a simple donkey. He challenged the greedy and powerful of his day with humility and peace. Authorities crucified him on Friday. But God raised him from the dead on Sunday. *The power of God’s love is greater than the powers of this world.*

This Palm Sunday, we want the world to know:

**We stand with Jesus Christ in his love for all.**

**When others forget, we will remember the way of Christ.**

We will feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and heal the sick.

We will practice loving all our neighbors, including our enemies.

We will teach that the whole earth is God's good Creation placed into our care.

And we will organize for a country that reflects these Christian values.

May it be so. Join me in prayer.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://mipalmsundaypath.org/promise>