

Text: [Matthew 21:1-11 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: April 13, 2025

Title: Seeking – Palm Sunday
“Where Are You Headed?”

Theme: Will we choose to get in the parade behind Pilate, or Jesus?

1

I don't know about you, but every day I find myself googling
whether something I'm reading about online *really* happened
I imagine fact-checkers everywhere must be living on Red Bull
and donuts these days, they're that busy

We're in an age where I fear satire is losing its resonance
Mainly because it's become indistinguishable from reality

In the 1700s, pastor Jonathan Swift wrote a satirical essay called
“A Modest Proposal” where he suggested poor Irish families
could ease their struggles by selling their children as food to
the rich

People reacted as though it was meant to be taken seriously
When it was, in reality, a brutal skewering of English rule over
Ireland

2

I fear that when the Church gathers on Palm Sunday that we
might repeat the mistake of the crowds
Of taking an act of satire too literally

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey
In order to fulfill prophecy
A ridiculous Messianic prophecy from Zechariah 9
That envisioned a king on a draft animal
Instead of a war-horse

Over the last several decades, scholars have increasingly warmed to the idea that this parade entering Jerusalem from the East, from the Mount of Olives

Was likely a premeditated and preplanned act of resistance by Jesus

A mirror image of Pilate's entry into the city at the head of a military procession coming from the West, from his palace near the Mediterranean coast

To keep order in a week where thousands of pilgrims would flock to Jerusalem

And there's good reason to believe Jesus' Palm Sunday procession was intended as a satirical act

Not least of which what sounds like a secret code that Jesus tells his disciples to share with the owners of the donkey and the colt:

We usually tend to think of this as a kind of Jesus-Jedi-mind trick: "If anyone asks, just tell them: 'The master needs them.'"

But in reality, this story – plus the Upper Room that comes into play on Thursday –

Provide evidence that Jesus had a network *beyond* the twelve who supported him in all kinds of ways

People who risked themselves to help him in his ministry

Now, that's just an aside, because I find it fascinating to consider that Jesus had secret supporters *everywhere*

3

Today's question is actually this: "Where are you headed?"

It's not a question coming from the scripture itself

Instead it arises from the movement of the crowd

And how we are tempted to follow along

So, let me ask you: Are we approaching Jerusalem from the East,
or from the West?

See, there are a whole lot of Christians today who want to ride in
from the West, with the troops
Believing that all the king's horses and all the king's men can put
the Church back together again
Imagining we can make it like it was in the 1950s

But even on that point, the Bible itself offers a cautionary tale:
Even when Israel was a theocracy ruled by kings
The vast majority of them receive report cards with really *low*
marks in righteousness

What Jesus was trying to say by riding in on a donkey is that the
kingdom of God is not really a *kingdom* at all
I mean, he himself says, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John
18:36)

That's why I usually use the word *kin-dom* instead – because it's
about connection
Not power, or authority, or the ability to tell people what to do

We don't pray "your will be done" OVER others' lives
We pray it INTO our own lives – and especially this week, as we
pray with Jesus in the Garden:
"Not my will, but thine be done"

So, yeah, riding in from the West with Pilate – that's not the way

4

But I'd also caution us that even when we *think* we're following
Jesus in from the East
We may *still* be missing the mark

I imagine there were plenty of people in that crowd cheering,
 "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"
Who were every bit as invested in having a king as those who
 stood to admire the legionaries as they marched past
They just wanted a king who would be friendlier to them!
And so they probably just saw the donkey as a stand-in for the
 horse Jesus would get once he overthrew the Romans
A rental

They were the folks who didn't get the irony,
couldn't grasp the satire of a king on a donkey
They couldn't imagine a world in which God WOULDN'T ride to
 the rescue
and "*deal*" with Pilate once and for all

I think that helps to explain why the crowd took such a hard turn
 against Jesus over the course of the week
They were convinced he was coming to save them
That's what *hosanna* means – "Save now!"
And when it became clear he either *couldn't* – or *wouldn't* – even
 save himself, they got angry and bitter

Let down once again by the One they expected to be their Savior
And so they said, "the cross will teach him"

After the Resurrection, the Bible says the Church numbered only
 120 people (Acts 1:15) – that's it
For all our emphasis on numbers
Our fear of the Church's declining influence
Let's not forget that number

120 – only 120 – who were willing to trust in his Way
Even when it contradicted everything they knew

5

And that's really the choice before us today, isn't it?
We know all about the road Pilate rode in on from the West
It's about money, and power, and authority, and influence
About revenge and retribution

We know a lot less about Jesus' road in from the East
Even faithful people in the Church have a hard time grasping it

Because it involves GIVING UP safety and certainty
GIVING UP our desire for power
And conforming our lives instead to the pattern of the cross

That's the invitation Jesus ALWAYS has for us:
I mean, didn't he say, "Take up your cross and follow me"?
But let's be honest:
That's one invitation where we usually just forget to RSVP

I don't love doing the difficult thing
Or the risky thing
None of us does
And yet, sometimes its very clear that's exactly what Jesus calls
us to do

To swallow our pride and reconcile
To speak up when others are silent
To lead when we know there's going to be resistance
To show mercy when we're so angry all we want is revenge

So in this Holy Week, where are you headed?
Will you choose to follow behind Pilate? Or Jesus?
Amen.

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