

SERMON - Mark 11:1-10
“An Unridden Colt”
Messiah Lutheran Church
Sunday, March 28, 2021

What are some of the “triumphal entries” we get to witness in everyday life? They might be rare, but they’re epic when they come around.

You see “triumphal entries” when teams win the big one. Think back to 2014 when the Seahawks won their first SuperBowl. I wasn’t around here when that happened, but thanks to Google Images, I can get a taste of what it was like. Do you remember the excitement and joy that descended on downtown Seattle? I imagine businesses closed up shop early that day, people flocked downtown, wanna get a good spot for the parade. The double decker busses filled with players drove by, little kids sat perched on their dad’s shoulders - craning their necks to get a glimpse of sports royalty. For the players and fans there that day, it’s an event that’ll be remembered and treasured for years.

Another “triumphal entry” some cities and some people get to experience from time to time is the president coming to visit. For weeks prior his agencies/his people make plans in the town to ensure his safety and protection. On the day he arrives, streets are closed. People take off of work, clear their schedules to come and see this man - to hear him speak. It’s that big of a deal. Everywhere you turn your head, you can see men in black suits - ready to spring into action at a moments notice. The crowd is captivated by the president’s every move. For years to come, people will remember the day that the President came to town, when they got to shake his hand and take a picture.

If you think these two things are incredible occasions, none of them can top this one - a king is approaching Jerusalem. Not just any king, but the one true king of the entire universe. There’s no chariot or celebration or riches that can do him the honor he’s due. But there is no chariot, no ornate decorations or riches thrown at his feet. There’s...drumroll...a small donkey. There are cut branches from the fields that are waved around- that’s how the city greets him. They lay their cloaks and clothing before the king - but those can’t be of considerable value, it’s ordinary clothes. This whole production is a unique celebration, to say the least. Some might even call it cute. When the president or a victory parade comes to town, those are events that you’d tell your grandkids about. These are precious memories you hold for a lifetime. But this processional was different. The joy quickly wore off. Not a week later some of the same people who said Hosanna in one breath will be shouting “Crucify him! Kill him!” with another.

We celebrate this triumphal entry every year and its a story that many of us are so familiar with. Yet at the same time this parade seems like such a great mystery. Why didn’t our Savior receive a grand entrance, a welcoming worthy of the one and only Son of God? A celebration that would rival some of the triumphal entries of today? Well, the truth is, this whole celebration was

Christ's own choice. He chose to ride in on an unriden colt. He rode in humbly. He chose humility. And in this snapshot, we have another reminder for the ages on who our Savior truly is. He's our humble King. He lowered himself to save us, he put us first. And that's a Savior who gives us comfort every day of our lives.

On that first Palm Sunday morning, Jesus and his disciples weren't far outside of Jerusalem. They were on their way towards Jerusalem, coming from Jericho. Jesus had just healed some blind men as they were heading that way. Once they got to Bethany and Bethphage, just east of Jerusalem, Jesus asked two of his disciples to go and obtain this special animal that he would ride in on.

This animal that these disciples retrieved is of special interest to us here this morning. Jesus broke in this unriden colt when he rode into the city that morning. The events of Palm Sunday are recorded in all four of the Gospels, but these simple words "**which no one has ever ridden**" are exclusive to Mark and Luke. For Jesus's purposes, it was crucial for this animal to be one that hadn't yet been used. There are several places in the Old Testament that mention how an unused, unworked animal was reserved and set aside for sacred purposes - like sacrifices to God, for example. And maybe that gives us a different perspective on Palm Sunday. Maybe we sometimes see Palm Sunday as a cheerful cute event - kids waving palms and riding in on the small donkey. It's a memorable image. But let this detail remind us just how important and sacred this event was. There's nothing cute about what Jesus was soon going to endure for us. What more sacred purpose could there be for this animal, than to lead our Lord Jesus into town to begin his Passion?

This unriden colt was also important to this event because it fulfilled the prophecy that Zechariah wrote, which we heard read a short while ago. Just as this prophet once prophesied and forecasted hundreds of years prior, now here it all was unfolding right in front of everyone's eyes. It's always fascinating to see episodes in the New Testament that refer back to the Old Testament - it reminds us that nothing in the Word happens by chance or coincidence - God is the author of history. God guided the writers to write and events to play out according to his will.

So as Jesus rode into town on this colt, meager as it may have been, the crowds and his disciples saw that something special was taking place. The multitudes of people who took the palm branches stood on either side of the processional as Jesus entered Jerusalem and they shouted their shouts of praise: **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!** Hosanna is a word that we hear and sing every year when we observe Palm Sunday - it's a word of praise that comes straight over from the Hebrew language and it means "save us". When all these crowds of people shouted "Hosanna" or "save us" that morning, it's wide open as to what they were asking Jesus to save them from. Many thought that this Jesus, the Messiah, was coming to set up an earthly kingdom and to reign as a king here in Jerusalem, hence why they also chanted about "**the coming kingdom of our Father David**". Just as David led Israel

during some of Israel's greatest years, maybe this long-awaited king was here to carry on and restore the kingdom of Israel.

But few in the crowd actually understood what was truly taking place. They thought they were cheering on an earthly king making his way into Jerusalem to set up shop for good. Jesus had something much greater in mind than ruling here on earth. Riding into Jerusalem was one stop on his way to Calvary to win the battle over Satan and sin. To set up and establish his rule not on some throne in some temple here, but to rule where it matters most - in the hearts of his people.

I want to turn your attention back to the colt for a moment: Jesus told two of his disciples that when they go into the village they'd find a colt, specifically, an unriden one, and to bring it to him - if they get questioned, say (this) to them), and that's exactly how the situation unfolded. Jesus didn't say "go pick around in that village and see if you can find an unriden colt". He said "Go. You'll find one there." Jesus knew before this happened what would happen. On an even larger scale, Jesus knew how this entire week was going to pan out before any of it happened. Earlier in Mark, Jesus predicted his death three times. He knew that he'd get the rockstar treatment on Sunday. But he also knew that on Thursday, one of his own would betray him. On Friday, he'd lose his life on the cross. Imagine yourself in Jesus' position for a moment, perched upon the colt. Looking at all these smiling faces, cheering, waving palms and laying their clothes down in front of you. But also knowing that these same faces that love you today will come to hate you just like that. To know that in advance had to be excruciating, tormenting.

And yet, knowing all of this he rode into Jerusalem to begin the most important week in world history. To go and die so that the likes of you and I would be forgiven for good, and one day get to live. Jesus' ministry was filled with these snapshots of his humility. Born in a crude feeding trough for barn animals. Rode into Jerusalem one of those animals. Washed his disciples feet hours before his death. Dying in the most criminal, dishonorable way possible. It's pretty clear - Jesus was humble. Jesus is humble. Deserving of the greatest honor but taking it's complete opposite. How does the humility and "you first" attitude of our Savior Jesus give us Christians comfort today?

Jesus knows your heart and mine. And more often than not, it's not much to look at, is it? Every day we fill this heart with things that aren't truly good for it. Anger, jealousy, envy, pride, greed, lust, hatred. We swear off our most habitual sins for good only to trip back into them moments later. We frequently break the 1st commandment when we put anything in this world, any desire, any sin in the spot where God belongs. We fail to put God first. Jesus knew where to find a good, unriden colt, just as he knew how that week would unfold, Jesus knows that we'll be right back here next week with the same sins, same confession - every Sunday, every day until we die.

Even though we're not always faithful to God, even though we don't always put God first - thank God that his faithfulness wasn't dependent on us. Isn't dependent on us. And never will be.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Knowing our sin, knowing we'd fail him and hurt him, while we were still sinners he did all this. He was born in the manger for us. He rode in for us. He died for us. He put us first.

Knowing and trusting that Christ came to save us, we can be at peace. You might hear someone joke and say "i'd be struck down on the spot if I were to walk through those church doors". Or maybe you once felt that way. But church is for you. Come, because it's not about you. "I don't know if I should come up to communion. I've been really wayward this past week. How could God still love me after everything I've done this week? The Lord's Supper is for you. Come, because it's not about you. It's an interesting equation. We come here on Sundays not because we're faithful, but because Jesus was faithful for us. And when we learn about Jesus, it's all about what he did not for himself, but for us.

As we walk down the familiar road of Holy Week, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter - it's going to be a week of many familiar stories and episodes. It's a week where we're really reminded of our great sins and what great sacrifice was required to pay for them. But we're also reminded of amazing grace, our Savior who did all this to save us. It's my prayer for all of us this Holy Week that these stories of our Savior's mysterious, wondrous love continue to leave us in awe, appreciation and wonder, even after all these years. A love that lives to put us first, and a love that will never leave us. God bless all of us as we journey with our LORD this Holy Week. Amen.