

Greek Theater.¹ (slide.1)

As Kimberley read, our text comes from the nineteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel and it concerns itself with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the day we now call Palm Sunday. I have some things to share about Christ, and about who He is, and about our call to worship Him. But let's begin by looking to our Lord in prayer (slide/black.2).

Growing up, our family rarely went on vacation (it just wasn't my dad's thing). But when I was fifteen years old, my parents splurged for what would be the biggest vacation we would ever take. We spent the summer in Greece; we were there for nine weeks. We saw (slide.3) the houses our parents grew up in. We met our paternal grandparents for the first and only time. We met cousins, and uncles, and aunts we never even knew existed. We also got to see famous buildings we had only read about in school—the Acropolis, and the Parthenon, and these amazing old churches. We ate octopus and sea urchins and roasted goat head. We even got to watch the first moon landing and (slide.4) *Star Trek* on television—complete with Greek subtitles. It was a cool trip.

One (slide/black.5) evening our mom told us to dress up because we were going to see a play in an old theater. Apart from a high-school production of *The Sound of Music*, I don't think I had ever been to a play, so the idea sounded interesting. I wasn't exactly sure what to expect. I thought it might be like *West Side Story* (but with Greeks and Turks fighting instead of Jets and Sharks). I pictured songs, and dancing, and elaborate sets, and a big orchestra. Since our mom had told us that the theater was old, I imagined something like the Tampa Theater with beautiful murals, ornate fountains, soft plush chairs, and a huge Wurlitzer pipe organ rising up from the floor.

So we arrived, and just as our mother, promised, the theater was old—but *2,000 years old!* And it was all outdoors. And it was all made of stone. Even the seats were made of stone. And the play was nothing like *West Side Story*. Instead, it was (slide.6) a bunch of people in togas wearing masks. And there were no songs and no dancing. In fact, the actors barely moved at all, and most of them spoke in unison (which was weird). And then when the leads in the play wanted to convey emotion, they simply changed the mask they were wearing to one with a different face. It was not at all what I expected (slide/black.7).

Entering Jerusalem.

So I think about that first Palm Sunday some 2,000 years ago, and I picture those in attendance there in Jerusalem similarly being struck by the unexpectedness of it all—*but times a million!* Given the first-century messianic anticipation among the Jewish people, and the hope for a conquering military hero, this is not what anyone would have expected—especially when compared to the pomp and ceremony that was common in the Roman world. The history books tell us that Romans knew how to enter a city. The king would ride in a magnificent chariot pulled by the finest horses. Placards would list the details of his conquests. Elephants would lumber along, dancers would dance, trumpeters would blast their horns. Commemorative coins would be thrown to the crowds. Everything was over-the-top.²

But the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was nothing like that. Instead, Jesus comes into the city on a donkey—and a borrowed one at that. We read in (slide.8) verse 29 that Jesus sends two of His disciples to a nearby village. He tells them that, when they get there, they'll see a baby donkey and that they're to untie it and bring it to Him. If anyone asks, "Why are you untying it?" they're to say (slide.9): "*The Lord has need of it?*" I'm always struck by this exchange. The disciples don't push for an explanation why. They just do it.

So we read that (slide.10) those who were sent found the donkey just as Jesus told them. While there, the owners ask (slide.11), "*Why are you untying the colt?*" As instructed, the disciples say (slide.12), "*The Lord has need of it.*" Interestingly, people who make their living studying biblical languages point out that, linguistically, the expression used here can mean, not just (slide.13) "*The Lord has need of it,*" but (slide.14) "*The Owner has need of it.*"³ In Ps 50:10 (slide.15) God declares, "*Every beast of the forest is mine, even the cattle on a thousand hills.*" That includes this donkey. (He'll give it back to you when He's done, but for now He needs it.) So (slide.16) the disciples bring the donkey to Jesus. In the other three Gospels we read that Jesus *sat* on the colt.⁴ In Luke's Gospel, we're given more detail. We're told that, like the coronation of a king, the disciples (slide.17) lift Jesus and set Him on the colt.⁵

Now, unlike the other Gospel accounts, there's no mention of (slide.18) Zechariah 9 and the language that speaks of a victorious king who rides humbly on the back of a donkey (though that's implied in our text). Nor is there any mention of palm branches that point back to (slide.19) Isaiah 55 and the trees of the field clapping their hands. But Luke does mention (slide.20) the cloaks spread on the ground, which is a callback to 2 Kings 9:13. And he mentions (slide.21) the Psalm 118 language used in verse 38.

All told, the scene may not be exactly what the people of Jerusalem expected (slide/black.22). We especially see in the later chapters of Luke's Gospel that even Christ's closest disciples are clueless as to what is fully taking place. Nevertheless, at least for this moment, we see the people rejoicing and praising with a loud voice over the mighty works they have been seeing.

I like (slide.23) this Byzantine icon depicting the triumphal entry. We see (slide.24) the disciples, or at least nine of them, urging Jesus on. And (slide.25) a child on the bottom of the painting laying his cloak on the ground. And (slide.26) another child (or maybe a man who is really far away) cutting branches off a tree. And (slide.27) this guy waiving one of those branches. And (slide.28) this kid feeding his branch to the donkey. And (slide.29) everyone is happy—at least as happy as you can be in a Byzantine icon. Well (slide.30), *almost* everybody.

We have these guys; they're whispering and looking back at Jesus and giving Him the stink eye. For all the celebrating taking place, another chapter is beginning to unfold as religious leaders begin to conspire/connive/plot/plan against our Lord. It starts in (slide.31) verse 39 where we read that some of the Pharisees in the crowd tell Jesus to rebuke His disciples for what they're doing. Jesus responds by saying (slide.32), *"I tell you, if these keep silent, the very stones will cry out."*

The language used here reflects a passage in (slide.33) Hab 2:11 that speaks of the stones from the wall and the beams from the woodwork crying out.⁶ Jesus is saying that this moment is of such importance, that it must find a response—and if not a human response, then another.⁷ And why is that? Because the king is here (slide.34). The image of the invisible God, the Lord over all creation, the head of the body, the firstborn from the dead; the one who is before all things and in whom all things hold together; the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

A King We Are to Worship.

So how do we respond to so great a king? Dovetailing off of the verse we just read, the only reasonable response for us as God's creation is worship. We can't just "like" Jesus; we can't just "admire" Him from a distance and speak of Him as a wise teacher, or a guru, or a moral example to be imitated. No, if the Jesus who rode through the streets of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday is who He said He is, then our only reasonable response is to give Him the worship He deserves. Yet oddly, as we read the pages of Scripture, it seems that the created order sometimes understands this better than we do.

I love the text (slide.35) James led us in earlier in our service. The idea of the heavens rejoicing, and the seas resounding, and the fields being full of jubilation, and trees of the forest richly singing for joy. It's funny; in speaking of creation, Psalm 19 (slide.36) declares that:

- ³ They have no speech.
They use no words; no sound is heard from them.
⁴ *And yet* their voice goes out into all the earth,
And their words to the ends of the world.

But then, here we are. And if we're not careful, we can spend our lives looking at our phones, or simply at the ground in front of us, and in the process forget to look up, and to enjoy, and to take in the world God has created, and to give Him praise and worship. I love this prayer by John Baillie. Baillie was a Scottish Presbyterian. Back in the 1930s he wrote a classic book on prayer. Here's (slide.37) a portion of one of his prayers; He prays, "God...

Forbid that I should walk through
Your beautiful world with unseeing eyes:
Forbid that, under the low roof of workshop or office or study,
I should ever forget Your great overarching sky:
Forbid that, when all Your creatures are greeting the morning with songs
and shouts of joy, I alone should wear a dull and sullen face.⁸

I love that line at the end; the idea of (slide.38) God's creation greeting the morning with songs and shouts of joy, while we sit with sullen/sour/ gloomy faces that fail to worship (slide/black.39). Our course, it may be tempting for some of you to say, "*I don't know about this worship stuff; I'm not especially religious.*" But I want to say that you are religious. We all are. Each and every one of us.

There's a writer; his name is (slide.40) David Foster Wallace (we've talked about him before). Years ago, Wallace gave a commencement address at Kenyon College in Ohio. At least at this point in his life, Wallace was not a professing believer. Yet here's what he had to say; he said that (slide.41):

In the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.

But Wallace went on to say (slide/black.42) that there's a problem with most of our worship. It falls short; and it falls short because it's too small. If you worship money, you'll never feel you have enough. If you worship your beauty, you'll always feel ugly (especially once gravity kicks in). If you worship power, you'll eventually feel weak and afraid. If you worship your intellect, you'll end up feeling stupid and on the verge of being found out. And the reason why is because anything small that is worshipped "will eat us alive."⁹

And Wallace is right. After all, your money cannot die for your sins. Neither can your beauty, or your status, or your intellect. Only Christ can die for your sins. Only Christ can bear the weight of our souls, and He does this through the peace and reconciliation that comes through the atoning work on the cross Mark spoke of last week.

Peace in Heaven.

There's something interesting that takes place in (slide.43) verse 38 of our text. After quoting that portion of Psalm 118, the crowd says something else; and there's something prophetic about what is said. The people say (slide.44): "*Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.*" Now given what we read of in the other three Gospels, we know that the crowd said many things on that particular day, but Luke is the only Gospel writer to call attention to this thing that was said. It seems like there's a reason why. *Can you think of something similar that's said earlier in Luke's Gospel?* It's the words of (slide.45) the angels from that very first Christmas night. In chapter 2 of this same Gospel, the angels surrounding the shepherds proclaim, "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth...*" As best as I can tell, no commentator/theologian (slide.46) thinks that this is just a coincidence.¹⁰

So what is this peace? It's peace between heaven and earth. It's (slide.47) Charles Wesley's Christmas carol. It is God and sinners reconciled. It's the idea that there was once *ill will* but now there's *goodwill*—there's reconciliation (slide/black.48). And this goodwill, this reconciliation, this peace we are in most need of comes about, not because the God of the universe decides to cut back on caffeine, and mellow out, and stop acting like God. And it definitely does not come about because we, somehow, figured out how to get our act together through religious duties and good works. No, this comes about because the Second Person of the Trinity, the unexpected king, out of His amazing grace, does everything necessary, *not to ignore sin, but to pay the price for our sin.*

Jesus came to do something we could not do on our own and pay a debt we could never pay. Were that not the case, the story could have stopped with Palm Sunday. But it doesn't stop there. Rather, in the midst of palms that are waved and songs that are sung and shouts of joy, we are vividly reminded that there is yet another part of the story still to come: There are feet to wash, a sacrament to enjoy, a garden-prayer to pray, a betrayal to endure, a trial to face, a scourging to suffer, a crown to wear, a cross to carry, a road to walk, a sacrifice to offer, *and a stone to move out of the way.*

This is the gospel.

This is what we're celebrating this Thursday and Friday,

And next Sunday and in the Sundays to come.

The story of how God brings healing to our humanity.

And the story of the God we are called worship with all we are and in all we do.

Let's pray.

¹ **OT congregation reading: Psalm 96:1-3, 11-13 (NIV).**

² Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 107.

³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 546; Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 295.

⁴ Matt 21:7; Mark 11:7; John 12:14.

⁵ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC, 456.

⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 481.

⁷ Brent R. Kinman, quoted in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 356.

⁸ John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 125.

⁹ David Foster Wallace, "This is Water" (lecture, Kenyon College Commencement Address, 5/21/05).

¹⁰ For example: Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 296; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 480; Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke: Volume 2, Chapters 13-24*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 334-35; Allison A. Trites, William J. Larkin, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, CBC (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 260.