

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5

*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

**March 28th, 2021
Palm Sunday**

...We Gather to Worship God...

Call to Worship:

Hymn: 218 - Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Prayer:

Gathering for worship today, we are like the crowd that lined the streets, witnessing your entry into Jerusalem.

Some of us gather here, full of enthusiasm.
Some of us gather wearied by what life has thrown at us.
Some of us have come out of curiosity.
Some of us out of habit.
Some of us gather with great expectation.
Some of us with no particular hopes.

It is here, O God, that you meet us and greet us and, if we will allow, it is here that you surprise us with your love and your grace.

So open our heavy eyes, and tired minds, steal into our closed hearts and surprise us today with joy.

Quell those unrealistic expectations, but open us to the possibility of hope and allow us to glimpse the goodness of your purpose for us.

Even when we cannot name it ourselves you know what ails us. We submit to your knowledge of us and we open ourselves to the need for your forgiveness, a forgiveness that comes freely and abundantly.

So with cleansed hearts and open minds, we join in the cry Hosanna!

Hosanna in the Highest!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.
Jesus, Son of David, hear us when we pray....
Our Father who art in heaven . . .

...We Listen to God's Word...

Word of God:

Old Testament: Psalm 118,

New Testament: Mark 11:1-11

Hymn: 214 - All glory, laud, and honour

Message: Riding on a Donkey



Way, hey and on we go, donkey riding, donkey riding. Way, hey and on we go, riding on a donkey.

A very popular sea shanty that is still sung. It was used originally for loading materials onto a boat. Hence, the first verse is often about Quebec. Have you ever been to Quebec, launching timber on the deck, where you break your bloody neck, riding on a donkey.

The riding on a donkey would lead one to believe that this shanty had a very old and long history that was not always tied to boats but this is the one we know now. Easily sung and verses are short and easily created on the spot. Fun.

This song came to mind because we are looking a someone who was riding a donkey this morning. I know a little bit about donkeys. John has got me watching vet shows - American, Canadian and British. Every so often there are donkeys. They are funny creatures. I think of them as a short, fat horse. This is probably not fair to either animal but I still think a fair description.

Being as I am still more familiar with horses, I looked up pictures on the net of donkeys. They are definitely on the short, round belly side so when you ride a donkey, apparently, you need to either sit astride the donkey with your knees pulled up or sit side saddle. Both seem to quite acceptable ways.

So these are the pictures that I want you to keep in mind as you think about the very familiar scripture reading that was read this morning. For the triumphal entry into

Jerusalem, Jesus rode a donkey. Not a horse, not a mule - which would give you a little more height and a little less belly - but a donkey.

In Mark, the writer adds the detail that this was a donkey that had never been ridden. This colt had not had anyone on its back before. This is not the kind of donkey that you or I would want to ride. Donkeys are short, round and - stubborn apparently. I am sure that it takes some time to make a donkey comfortable with someone riding on them.

This is a very vivid scene in the gospel of Mark. This section that is entitled the Triumphal entry or Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King. This is really a striking event in the book of Mark. Jesus has spent a great deal of time telling his disciples and those that he has healed or cast out demons to not say he is the Messiah or Son of David or the Holy One. They were told to be quiet - though many were not very good at doing that. Their healing was such good news that they did not keep it to themselves. Jesus however, has not made any of these claims for himself during his ministry until this point. This entry into Jerusalem that begins his last week of life .

This time, Jesus does not tell the people to be quiet. Everyone comes out and sings and shouts as he enters into Jerusalem. It is that spontaneous parade - like the Raptors basketball team arriving home after winning the title. It was a partially planned event where everyone came to see what was happening. That parade lasted five hours longer than anyone was expecting. It was a great day! Everyone was shouting and cheering. It was a great event.

Note the excitement that is building as the disciples go to get the donkey. They are simply to say that my Lord is in need of it. This is the first time that this owner has ever been acknowledged by a 'Lord' and then to find out that the colt is only being borrowed and not taken. It is all very strange and interesting. I am sure when they saw Jesus that many recognized him or people informed them of who he was. They were having a great time laying down their cloaks and branches to make a path for the entrance through the gates into Jerusalem for this person who had become so important to them.

We often think of this triumphal entry like the homecoming of some sports team. It is exciting and fun. It is a celebration with no worries. But something more is happening in Jerusalem. This is a grand celebration and it is subversive. People are claiming Jesus to be the long awaited Saviour and treating him like a king.

What we forget or may not even know is there was tension in Jerusalem. This is where the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was not like the Raptors triumphal entry. The people of the day would have been very aware of the fact that there was another procession that would have happened probably the same day. Pontius Pilate, the ruler now of Judea on behalf of the Roman empire would have made an entrance into Jerusalem for the Passover as well. He had no intentions of celebrating the Passover. Pontius Pilate was Roman not Jewish. He would have come with his military this year as he did every year with his military to “keep the peace” during the festival. I think that is to be interpreted as making sure a revolt or rebellion did not begin when so many Jewish people were together. There probably was a great number of soldiers roaming in among the people all week long. Pontius Pilate, I am sure, rode in on a horse, sitting high in the saddle and not side saddle on a donkey! The military would have rode or marched in front and behind him making a sort of parade as they enter through a different gate to get to the Roman governor’s residence in Jerusalem. It is possible that Herod Agrippa was there as well. That would have been another grand entrance with splendid horses and maybe even a chariot. And more soldiers. Probably slaves as well. And fear. They would always bring fear.

I think what saves the people from having the army come and attack this mass gathering is this silly donkey! This Lord, this king, this Messiah enters Jerusalem with a parade of ordinary people on the least military beast possible. A donkey. Matthew’s account includes a female donkey who is still nursing her young colt so they both have to be in the parade. So can’t you see it? Jesus riding side saddle on a donkey with the young one trotting along beside them. This is a very powerful picture but not in a military sort of way. This show of strength is humble, full of life and peace. There is no chattels of war, no slaves, no soldiers, no deaths for sacrifices which came with triumphal entries to Rome. Which came with Alexander’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem in 332 BCE. This Messiah came without fear. This messiah was going to bring peace to the nations - and this peace was going to come about in a very different way than the way the Roman Empire was doing peace.

Jesus is changing the script of Messiah. We are now seeing what that looks like. There is no fear caused by Jesus’ entry. There is no fighting or shoving or violence. There are no swords and no slaves. Jesus entered, looked around and left because it was getting late. I believe that triumphal entries by Roman generals ended very differently at than that at the end of the day.

What does it mean to be powerful in the Kingdom of God? What does it mean to follow the Messiah? What does it mean to be a peacemaker? On St. Patrick’s day, I

listened to Rev. Steve Stockman, the minister of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in Belfast, Ireland talk about peacemaking. He very successful got me thinking about these things.

Many of you will remember the troubles of Ireland. During the two weeks of March 14th, 1988, violence and tragedy in Belfast was reaching a new level. It was tearing itself apart. The deaths of these days also became the tipping point for the brokering of the peace agreement between the Sinn Fein/IRA and the Unionists. You will probably know the names of Gerry Adams, leader of the Sinn Fein, and John Hume, leader of the Unionists but you probably do not know the name of Fr. Alex Reid who is now considered one of the key figures in the peace process. He is not your classic hero. In fact, Rev. Steve Stockman described Fr. Alex Reid as rather odd and maybe a little crazy. Fr. Alex Reid was simply a priest who was part of the Clonard monastery which is part of the Redemptorist religious order in Belfast and he believed that God was not part of the violence in their country and so somehow he became the between, the person who carried the messages back and forth between the Sinn Fein and the Unionists. At the peak of the violence in that month of March 1988, he was in the middle of it - not some much trying to stop the brutality, though he tried to his very best to stop it - but because he was carrying a letter in his pocket, a letter that he thought was of great importance that he had to get from Gerry Adams to John Hume and it was. That was the letter led to the peace deal four years later.

If you look at pictures of this man, you will not see a hero riding on a horse but a man would have been side saddle on a donkey. Do you know that it was several years later that he finally disclosed to a journalist why he was in the middle of the violence on that particular day in March. Many had believed that he was simply a crazy priest believing that he could somehow make a difference. He did not argue with that fact. However, that fact that he was carrying a letter of peace in his pocket only made him seem crazier. There must have been an easier way to get the letter from one person than being in the middle of the fight.

During many palm Sundays, I have wanted to put Jesus on a horse - I call it a colt and lean out the donkey body and give the beast just a little more height than it would - if not purple robes at least very clean, beautiful white robes - making him look grand as he entered Jerusalem. This does not do the text justice. This was an ordinary looking person riding on a very young donkey - one that could stop and buck at any time - with people having a wonderful time greeting him as he entered the city. Jesus did not need to plan the event and force people to be paying attention. They knew him and were genuinely excited to be part of this parade seeing him coming into the

city for the week of Passover. I think that soldiers did not come and break this up because they thought it was funny. They did not see the power of this event. They did not understand that this king and God's kingdom was going to be very different. God did not need to use a show of military force to show his power. He used a colt that had never been ridden to show his power.

Palm Sunday. A day to hail Jesus as our matchless King in all Eternity. But do not forget that he comes in this crazy, humble, almost awkward way showing that God's power is very different than the empire's power. This power is found in weakness. This strength is found in the making of peace. This force is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what propelled a funny, strange Catholic priest into the midst of the Irish troubles. This is what has propelled many others in strange ways to work for peace. It is in this that our hope lies. Please come and journey with us from this Palm Sunday to Easter and continue to be surprised again by who we praise and worship.

...We Respond in Service...

Collection & Dedication: Let us present to God our tithes and offerings.

(At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to office@westminsterchurch.ca. You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)

Prayers of the People:

You are on your way to Jerusalem, precious Lord.

You are one your way to suffering and to death for the sake of our freedom and our salvation. This is mystery and wonder. Our hearts overflow into songs of praise. "Hosanna!", we cry with the crowds. "Blessed are you who comes in God's name!"

Yet, you puzzle us: you puzzle us with your suffering love that is more powerful than our brokenness; you puzzle us with your freely chosen humility that brings blessings in our weary places; you puzzle us with your forgiveness that summons us beyond our hurt.

Liberating Saviour, you make us uncomfortable so that you can lead us into more life

and deeper wonder; so that God can take who we are and break us open, and bless us and give us to the world.

Grant us grace to welcome holy restlessness, that we may live by the power of your Spirit, and in your name. Amen.

Hymn: 217 - Ride on, Ride on in Majesty

Benediction

Now as you go from here, may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.

