

## **“The Source of Courage”**

**Matthew 21:1-11**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

April 9, 2017

**Palm Sunday**

When I saw the children coming into the sanctuary this morning waving palm branches, I was reminded of the story of the little boy who was too sick to go to church on Palm Sunday. When his brother returned home after the service, he could hardly wait to tell him what he missed.

“You picked the wrong day to be sick,” he told his ailing brother. “You are not going to believe what happened. Jesus came riding into the sanctuary on a donkey, and we all walked alongside him waving palm branches!”

“Aw man!” the younger brother exclaimed. “I can’t believe it. The one Sunday I missed and Jesus showed up!”

This morning, let’s talk about the event in Jesus’ life this little boy thought he missed. The fact Jesus’ grand entrance into Jerusalem is included in all four gospels and has been re-enacted every year in the Holy City since the fourth century indicates how significant it is.

Jesus and his disciples were on a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. In all likelihood, they traveled with others along major stretches of the road. It was customary for pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for Passover to travel in caravans.

When this occurred, rabbis would teach as they walked, creating a mobile classroom. Even those who did not intend to go to Jerusalem for Passover would walk a mile or two in the

caravan in order to listen to the rabbi teach. I suspect Jesus attracted quite a few people in his group since he was such a reputable teacher.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples into a nearby village to secure a colt for him to ride on the final leg of the journey. It appears Jesus had already arranged this because he told the disciples exactly where to go, what to look for and what to say if someone asked them what they were doing.

When the disciples returned, Jesus mounted the colt and began his descent into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Many around Jesus spread their cloaks or palm branches on the path before him. They began shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)

As you would expect, this kind of fanfare caught people's attention and caused many to ask, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:10)

Those surrounding Jesus replied to their question by saying, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:11)

**Just what is going on here?** Is this a parade, a Protest March or a funeral procession? Dr. Fred Craddock says it is all three.

It certainly looked like a parade, which seems a bit odd given all we know about Jesus up to this point. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus avoided the limelight. He often told those he healed not to tell anyone what he had done.

This desire for privacy and obscurity changed dramatically that Sunday evening. Jesus entered Jerusalem with all the pomp and pageantry of a parade for a celebrity. Why did Jesus do this?

Jesus meticulously staged this parade to draw a contrast between him and the Roman governor, Pilate, who would also ride through the streets of Jerusalem that same day surrounded by his followers. Pilate's entrance and the reasons for it would be radically different from Jesus', though.

Pilate would come to Jerusalem to intimidate the Jews and to let them know any thoughts of overthrowing the Romans during Passover when so many Jews would be together would be met with stiff resistance and disaster. This is why Pilate rode a horse, symbolic of war, and was surrounded by soldiers carrying spears.

Jesus, on the other hand, came to Jerusalem to make hope visible to the masses who were struggling to survive. It is why he rode on a donkey, symbolic of peace, and was surrounded by common folk waving palm branches.

Jesus was following in the footsteps of the prophets that day by letting his actions speak for him. All who saw Jesus come into Jerusalem from the east and Pilate from the west could not help but notice the differences and understand the symbolism.

So yes, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem that day was a parade. It was not the typical kind of parade we think of in modern times with bands, floats and antique cars. It was a simple parade designed to send a hopeful message that would conjure up memories of what was written by Zechariah.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Palm Sunday is about more than a parade, though. What Jesus did that day was also a Protest March and a funeral procession. Jesus was entering the eye of the storm, and danger was lurking in the shadows.

Jesus did not go to Passover that year to sign autographs and be wined and dined like a celebrity. He went to have a showdown with the religious authorities with whom he was upset.

Jesus believed they were corrupt, callous and self-indulgent. Instead of helping people carry their burdens and meet life's toughest challenges, they helped themselves to the public coffers, money that should have been used to improve everyone's quality of life.

In Jesus' opinion, the Chief Priests, scribes and Pharisees did not reflect the heart and nature of God. They were far too self-centered and self-absorbed.

This was why Jesus went to Passover that year. He wanted to confront the religious authorities on their turf, exposing their hypocrisy and holding them accountable for their abuse of power.

This is exactly what Jesus did throughout the week. Each day he told parables to those gathered in and around the Temple that indicted the religious leaders for their selfish ways and ruthless leadership.

By Thursday night, these leaders had enough and arrested Jesus. On Friday morning, they persuaded Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Parade? Protest March? Funeral procession? What was this entrance by Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? I believe Craddock was correct. It was all three.

**How does Jesus' entry into Jerusalem speak to us today?** I pondered this question last week and for me it boiled down to this. Palm Sunday revealed the courage of Jesus.

He could have slipped into Jerusalem under the cover of darkness and flown under the radar all week, but he did not. This was not a time for Jesus to be timid, shy or fearful. It was a time for him to be bold, forthright and prophetic, which he was.

**Where does this kind of courage come from, the courage Jesus exhibited on Palm Sunday and Holy Week?** Perhaps you are facing an intimidating challenge, or you are heading down an unfamiliar road. Your knees are shaking and your heart is pounding. You are worried and fearful, and you need a healthy dose of courage.

**Where do you find the courage that enables you to do the difficult?** From where does this high level of courage come?

**First of all, I think courage comes from within.** I believe God is the source of courage, and when we develop and cultivate a close relationship with God, as Jesus did, the seeds of courage grow and bloom in our hearts.

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” Paul wrote to the Romans. (8:31)

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength,” Paul penned in his letter to the Philippians. (4:13)

This is why Paul also included this declaration in his letter to the Philippians. “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (3:10-11)

Courage comes to us from God when we seek God’s will and make a commitment to reflect God’s heart and nature in all we do. The moment we make the decision to live by the Golden Rule, God will give us the courage to be honest, trustworthy, reliable, faithful, compassionate, kind, generous and humble.

When we offer God our time, talents, abilities, resources, voice and influence to confront evil, to expose injustice, to right wrongs, to demand truth, to lift up the lowly, to liberate the oppressed, to respond to those who are hurting, to comfort the grieving, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to love the unlovely, to forgive our enemies and to build bridges of reconciliation, courage will come.

This is what Jesus did. It is what we can do, and when we do, we’ll never lack for courage to be a person of integrity and compassion. Like Jesus, we’ll be empowered to do the difficult.

Will you make a commitment on this Palm Sunday to draw closer to God and seek God’s will in all you do? If you will, that looming challenge will not be so intimidating and that unfamiliar road will not look so scary.

**I also believe courage comes from outside of us.** Courage grows in the soil of encouragement. It blossoms as others reveal their confidence in us.

In the 1939 classic movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, the lion joined Dorothy, the scarecrow and the tin man on their way to the Emerald City to see the Wizard so he could magically provide what was missing in their lives. The lion, you recall, could hardly wait to have an audience with the Wizard to receive courage. How disappointed he was to discover the Wizard was no miracle worker, but a con artist who was merely pulling levers behind a curtain.

All was not lost, though. The lion's spirit soared when the Wizard pointed out that he had acted courageously along this journey in spite of his fears. As a result, he gave the lion a medal of bravery that would serve as a reminder of his inner strength and courage.

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" the pilgrims around Jesus chanted on Palm Sunday. They certainly saw more than a Galilean carpenter or itinerant preacher that day. They saw a messenger sent from God to help them in their pursuit of justice and peace.

Their words of encouragement had to strengthen Jesus and prepare him for what was to come. At that moment, he was a man of the people but also a man for the people. He could not let them down!

**Whose words of encouragement helped you to overcome your fears and accept a big challenge?** Who saw potential in you that you were unable or unwilling to see? Who helped you to dream new dreams and gave you the confidence you needed to make them come true? Who lifted your spirits when doubts and fears caused them to fall?

Thank God for people who walk alongside us to encourage us on our journey. Where would we be without them?

**Is it time to pass it forward?** How could your words of encouragement inspire and motivate someone struggling with their fears? How could your friendship and support give them wings to soar above their fears? Ask God to give you the wisdom and courage you need to reach out to them this week.