

## *Jesus in the Gospel of John*

### *“The Suffering and Death of Jesus”*

[John 19:14b-20](#)

What we have demonstrated this morning from the procession with the choir, children and the entire church about Christ riding on a donkey in Jerusalem and the crowd saying Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest set the stage for the arrest, trial, suffering and death of Jesus. The text from the Gospel of John states that Pilate yielded to the demands of the crowd to crucify Christ.

The incident on the first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem was a fulfillment of Zachariah’s prophesy: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; he is just and having a salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey (Zachariah 9:9).

#### **We could ask ourselves several questions:**

Why Jesus did pick this particular day to do what he did?

What was his message to the people that day?

What were the consequences for doing what he did?

How do we interpret the actions of the crowd, religious leaders and political powers that day?

And what all these meant for the church today?

#### **Let me begin with some contextual analysis:**

Jerusalem was the capital city of Palestine and a very important city in the days of Jesus. To Israel, Jerusalem was the center of the world where God dwells in the Temple, the same Temple that hosts the Ark of the Covenant. Pilgrimages were frequent in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was also the administrative, economic and cultural center of Palestine. The Roman administration under Pontius Pilate in the region was directed from the Caesars, the Caesars who had successively divinized or called themselves “Sons of God”. Rome like the Western powers today who depend on the Middle- East for raw materials depended on Jerusalem and Palestine for grain and other necessities. Jerusalem was economically, and political structured and situated to serve the interest of the Roman powers. Rome had imperial control over Jerusalem ...the Holy city of God. It also assumed security and control over the Temple of God in the Holy City of God.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on the day of Passover, which was and is a very important day on the Jewish calendar. This Passover day is as important as the birth, death and resurrection of Christ are important on the Christian calendar. The Jews celebrate the Passover feast to remember Israel’s historic deliverance from Egypt. It was this Passover symbol that saw the death of the first born sons of the Egyptians. Furthermore, it was the death of the first born sons of the Egyptians and other circumstances that paved the way to let the people of Israel go from the land of Egypt as they cross the Red sea to their promised land. Whenever this feast was celebrated, and even today, I presume, the city of Jerusalem erupts into jubilation, power, and shouts of joy. The feast of the Passover is always celebrated in commemoration of what God has done for Israel in the past and probably continues to do for Israel in the present. The population in Jerusalem would triple and pilgrims from around the world would come to celebrate the peace and joy of God.

It was during this feast of Passover, a day Israel celebrates and remembers her freedom from captivity, the all-important day in the history of the Jews that Jesus decided to enter Jerusalem and openly in a different style, mood and with his Messianic intention.

Political analysts would say that Jesus went to Jerusalem to make two demonstrations. Firstly, to demonstrate against the Roman imperial control over the city of Jerusalem...the Holy City of God and secondly, to demonstrate against the Roman imperial control over the Temple of God which hosts the Ark of the Covenant of God. Everything about Israel and God were written and stored in the Ark of the Covenant of God. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God among His people.

This day, A Palm Sunday, A Passover day, two powers entered Jerusalem at the same time with different intentions and motives. Jesus, on one hand finding his way to the temple to proclaim his Messianic message and Kingdom and Pontius Pilate who represents the Roman powers to take strategic positions with his armies to secure the city and try to keep hooligans from the street on the other hand.

It was the duty of the Roman Governors to make sure that peace prevails in their sub-religions and one of the days the Roman authorities keep an eye on especially in the region of Jerusalem was the day of Passover or the Passover feast.

Jesus arranged his march on this day because he knew the Roman powers will come out. Jesus knew the Caesars who call themselves "Sons of God" would come out to take control of the city and guide the Temple and also take care of the trouble makers. He knew the population of the city would triple. He knew the top religious leaders will be in the temple to do what they always do. To Jesus, this was the perfect time to come out and show who he is to his people, to the Romans, to the powers that divide and to the entire world. To Jesus this was the perfect time to make a non-violent and peaceful demonstration that speaks to the powers that divide his people. He believes that was the perfect time he can speak openly for his people against the tyranny of the Roman Empire.

Matthew, Mark and Luke state that Jesus came down from the direction of Mount of Olives, an area Jesus may have done some of his ministries like the raising of Lazarus; healing the blinds, the sick and casting our demons. Jesus may have garnished thousands of followers, supporters, well-wishers and friends along the way from the directions of Mount of Olives coming down to Jerusalem that day.

He arranged for a donkey which represents peace. And as he sat on the donkey descending on to Jerusalem, words spread so fast. Come and see the man who tells me everything that I have done. Come and see the man who heals the sick and raises the dead. Come and see the man who is going to take care of the Roman imperial structure and restore power to his people. Come and see the man who is our savior... Hosanna in the highest... Hosanna in the highest ... Hosanna in the highest...

This was the man the Jews were waiting for and no doubt a large crowd from around the region came down to Jerusalem with him in anticipation of a riot to take over the Roman powers but to their disappointment that was not the intention or position of Jesus. The crowd saw a different messiah whose intention is to come and show a different kingship and kingdom, a different man and a different person who represents God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus marched peacefully through the city to the Temple and took the religious leaders to task and threw their businesses out of the Temple. The Roman Pontius Pilate was supposedly around with his scores of army probably overlooking the Temple. There were no violent demonstrations and so the army did nothing and again for fear of a bloody riot they probably stayed back.

As a naturalized immigrant and coming from one of the “shit hole countries” says our president, don’t you think I could set myself up for trouble and subsequent deportation if I am to obstruct my president or Governor and entourage of police and military personnel from using the street that passes through my church campus?

These were some of the issues that set Jesus up for his arrest, trial, suffering and subsequent execution or crucifixion and according to history and texts Jesus knew about it all. The Passion Week which we will begin tomorrow was set and the crowd dispersed to their different villages. They have seen the messiah but a different messiah and not the one they thought would bring salvation by overthrowing the Roman powers out.

Some commentators and preachers will say that the people who said Hosanna in the highest on this day were the same group people who said crucify him on Friday. In as much as these sayings may be true to some extent, it is my view that Jerusalem was over crowded on that day. Friends may have come with Jesus from the country side. Pilgrims, business people may had flocked into Jerusalem. These people could have been in majority in the procession that day. These people may had gone to their different villages by the end of the day after they had seen a different messiah and not the one they thought could come to overthrow the Roman imperial structure. They may have finished doing their business. In their absence, the time was perfect especially for some religious leaders who thought their religion and Temple is in danger for destruction and then the political powers too may have thought that it is time to take care of this one man who calls himself King of the Jews. Plans underway. They may have used a small number or even paid people to step up to say crucify Him on Friday. This is very common in politics. Conspiracy if you will call it.

This narrative is one of contrast in our Christian tradition and scripture. It is a story of a man who came as a lowly servant on a donkey and not on a prancing steed, not in a royal robe, but in a cloth of the poor, humbly representing the peasant population of his time. Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the world not to conquer by force but by love, grace and mercy. Jesus did not enter Jerusalem with armies and splendor but with lowliness and servanthood. Jesus conquered not kingdoms, territories, regions but hearts and minds like me and you to take care of lives, the planet systems and help those who cannot help themselves. His message that day was one of peace and peace with God. As a church today we exhibit such qualities of entry with open hearts, minds and hands, as a United Methodist would say.

Reflecting further on this day reminds me of some political and religious characters whose beliefs and faith in non-violence, protests and peaceful demonstrations for deconstruction and reconstruction of systemic issues caused them their lives. Among these are Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

Abraham Lincoln, commonly known as Honest Abe, was shot dead on Good Friday April 14<sup>th</sup> 1865. He was one who fought to abolish human slavery and further worked hard to preserve the American Union in existence today. While embarking on reconstruction and working on other issues that divide the nation he was killed by a political assassin.

Martin Luther King Jr. the superstar of the civil right movement believed in a non –violent and civil disobedience to push for desegregation, voting rights and other civil rights of African Americans. White supremacists did all they could through bombing, beating and murders like Rome did in the days of Jesus to maintain the status quo. He was shot on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1968 four years after I was born. I do recall this event through the tears of my late father though living in Africa at that time.

With all these in mind we see why the church should be the mouth piece of the world and those it serves. As a church we are called to follow the examples of Jesus to speak for the voiceless, the marginalized and to fight eliminate all the vices and phobias that divide our communities, the church and the world. Local churches including ours have a lot to do in fighting systemic issues that divide communities and groups. As individuals we have the mandate to fight for any course that dehumanizes and intimidates others. We need to state the truth whenever the truth needs to be stated, where ever the truth needs to be stated and in whatever circumstances the truth needs to be stated otherwise we lose the quality of following Christ and been the church.

The message of Palm Sunday is that Jesus is identified openly as the Messiah, Son of God and King in opposition to the assumed “Sons of God ‘and kingship of the Roman imperial powers. This was a politically and spiritually motivated situation no matter what you call it.

Jesus himself encouraged the identification and he suffered for this course. As a church, a local church, individuals and groups we need to identify with Jesus politically and religiously as the mouth piece of what is wrong and right no matter the consequences. AMEN