



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# **The Journey VI: Welcoming Jesus**

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**Luke 19:28-40 (NRSV)**

***Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem***

*28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.*

*29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"*

*<sup>34</sup> They said, "The Lord needs it." <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying,*

*"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"*

*<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." <sup>40</sup> He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."*

*35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty. 36 But I said to you that you have indeed seen Me, and yet you do not believe.*

*37 Everything that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I certainly will not cast out.*

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### Welcoming Jesus

Today is Palm Sunday. On another Palm Sunday, 5-year-old Tommy was home from church with a sitter due to a sore throat. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm branches. Tommy asked them what they were for. "People held them over Jesus' head as he walked by," his father told him. "Wouldn't you know it," Tommy fumed, "the one Sunday I don't go and Jesus shows up." Palm Sunday is the day Jesus showed up in Jerusalem, in dramatic fashion. He passed through the gates but didn't stop there. He continued through the heart of the city, leading to the cross of Calvary where love was poured out for each one of us.

While Jesus has meticulously planned his arrival, the people are surprised! No one had mapped out a parade route with floats and marching bands. They were delighted to see Jesus, this acclaimed rabbi joining in their Passover celebrations. Theirs was a spontaneous celebration. Imagine going about your business to the market, your work to find Jesus coming up behind you. The pilgrims in Jerusalem were thrilled

## The Journey VI: Welcoming Jesus

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to see Jesus firsthand. Shouts of “Hosanna, Save Us” filled the air. Passover Songs began. In these songs God sweeps in with a mighty hand and wipes out the enemy. Even the donkey plays a role in elevating expectations. Zechariah claims, “The prophet your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.” While each gospel gives the play by play, Luke is unique as no palm branches are found. The spectators reportedly take their cloaks and line the parade route. The people are momentarily moved beyond their own concerns, their own agendas, and only to find a way to offer some adequate form of praise to this man who offers them hope and the promise of a different kind of future. For this moment at least, the crowd exemplifies what Eugene Peterson calls “a long obedience in the same direction”—so caught up in the moment they offered Jesus the very shirt off their backs.

In the Jewish society, justice was served for crimes including failure to pay debts by appearing before a judge. There were moral limits on what could be demanded in payment for debts. Among those things that were legally “off-limits” was a person’s most important piece of clothing, their “cloak.” But a person’s cloak was in a category by itself. A cloak offered warmth and protection. It provided modesty, shielding nakedness. A cloak doubled as clothing and shelter, even a bedroll by night. You could take a lot in payment for debts, but you could not take the cloak off someone’s back. The exuberant crowd literally offers the shirt off their backs to create a royal “way” for Jesus to follow as he enters the city. The Greek word is *strōnumi* to spread. The crowds were welcoming Jesus like a god or a conquering hero.

What if Jesus came to your house? What if Jesus came to our church, God's house? As a child I had a book "If Jesus Came to my House" by Joan Thomas. The book features a perfect playdate with Jesus who was the same height and dressed like the young child. Jesus liked all the same things, he ate the same snacks, climbed the tree to see the baby birds, bounced on the bed and walked close by in the scary places in the house. But Jesus wore a halo. A picture-perfect day spent with a Jesus. The pictures are sweet and precious but as the Apostle Paul writes, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Cor.13:11).

Inviting Jesus into our lives gives us a time to take inventory of our beliefs. Maybe you picture God whose job is simply to satisfy your deepest desires. Maybe God is a cosmic bodyguard who protects you from harm. Or the world's best nanny, making sure your children turn out right. Or a divine doctor, healing your every physical and mental ailment. Or a wonder-working accountant, solving all your financial problems. We all tend to assume that God is the deity we want; not unlike the people of Jerusalem. This works pretty well, as long as God seems to do what we want. But the moment God doesn't conform to our expectations, our whole world rattles. A baby is born with a disability. A person you love abandons you for another. A friend dies before her time. The expectations you placed on God switch into distrust, into disappointment, or worse we think God has abandon us all together. As author Anne Lamott says, "Expectations are resentments under construction."

## The Journey VI: Welcoming Jesus

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The Palm Sunday story displays the transition from expectation to disappointment in broad daylight. Here we have a picture of what happens to a group of very religious people when they feel disappointed by God. As soon as Jesus turns out to be something other than the savior they expect, their Hosannas morph into “Crucify him!” Jesus is a king, but not the kind they wanted. He will serve rather than be served. He teaches us to love not just those we choose but even our enemies, to forgive all the way to the cross. Jesus does not intend to meet our *expectations*. Instead, he comes to save our souls.

Ultimately, the triumphal entry is not about donkeys and palm branches at all. It’s a reminder that placing expectations on God based on our wants is a recipe for disaster. But welcoming Jesus with an openness to divine mystery is a framework for faith. We need to let God be who God is, not who we wish God would be. The choice is ours. And who knows? If we decide to step away from the parade, maybe we’ll find ourselves at the foot of a cross, giving up all we have for the One who gave up everything for us.





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