

**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**



SERMON

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# The Good News Inspires Us to Act

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Inspires Us to Act**  
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### Introduction

The Gospel of Mark puts its stake in the ground in its first sentence:

The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This Lenten season, we have been listening for good news, attuning ourselves to the goodness of God still at work in our world. And from start to finish, the Gospel of Mark points us to Christ himself as good news, even amid the harsh reality of the world he entered.

And Mark lets his readers know from the start: Jesus is God's anointed one. God's chosen Son. He is the coming King, the one promised to reign forever on David's throne. This is not just good news; it's spectacular news for these people who have lived under the thumb of Roman rule.

The Son of God had come into the world, healed the sick, cast out demons, fed multitudes, stilled storms, and proclaimed that God's Kingdom had now, finally come near. The people were ready for their King to be inaugurated.

There was, however, a wrench in all this good news. As excitement built around Jesus, he kept squashing it.

Peter proclaimed—rightly!—that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Son.

And then, Jesus insisted he would be killed.

He repeated this inconvenient truth again, after he was transfigured, and again as they made their way up to Jerusalem.

Some commentaries claim that the disciples did not understand. Really, they would not understand. They would not hear what they did not want to hear.

Jesus would enter Jerusalem in a triumphant parade. Jesus would be inaugurated king of God's everlasting kingdom. Jesus would rule, Son of God and Messiah, claiming religious and political victory over every enemy.

But he would turn the world upside down to do it. He would upend every expectation of a coming king. And that is very good news.

### **Prayer for Illumination**

Loving God,

As we begin the journey of Holy Week,

Walking with Jesus the path that leads to the cross,

to the silence of Holy Saturday, and to the astounding joy of resurrection,

stir in our hearts the boldness to follow every step of the way.

Help us to not only understand the good news that Jesus brings,  
but make it alive in us. Amen.

### Scripture

Mark 11:1-11

### Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

**11** When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this: 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' " <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said, and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

<sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **Warhorses and Donkeys**

Let's begin with what was happening off the page during this week of Passover.

Jewish people from across the region were journeying up to Jerusalem. It's always up, no matter the altitude or direction from which you come. The people journeyed to draw near to God.

Ordinarily, the city had around 40,000 inhabitants, but at Passover that number swelled to over 300,000. There were celebrations, reunions; it was an embodied reminder of who these Jewish people were. They were not just their small-town synagogue, not just the work they did to survive, not the taxes and disrespect they endured from Rome. They were the people of God. They were the descendants of those who were liberated from slavery and oppression. Their God was a God

who heard their cries. And this was their ancestral city, the seat of power from which David reigned.

The Roman Governor did not take chances when it came to potential Passover-fueled revolts.

Along with the thousands of pilgrims entering the city, Pontius Pilate himself came from the west. He entered with a Roman guard, soldiers, horsemen, riding upon his own warhorse in victory, showing the people whose city this really was. It would have been an impressive show.

The wealthy and powerful, the real players in the realms of economics, politics, and religion, gathered around Pilate's procession. They offered their praise of him, welcomed his armed guards into the city of peace—the literal meaning of “Jerusalem.” They would help him keep the crowds, the potential ruff raff, under control. The recognition of Passover would not upend the status quo they had worked so hard to establish. The fragile equilibrium that propped up their own positions of power.

From the west came Pilate.

And from the east came Jesus.

Every time I read the Palm Sunday story, I think of Halloween in Mount Lebanon. There is a parade that starts at the fire

station and goes down Washington Rd, stopping at the library. In the parade there are scouts and daycares, businesses and nonprofits, bands and dance troops, all dressed up in costumes and throwing candy out to the sidewalks.

But along the side there are also families dressed up in costumes, especially the kids. Superheroes, ghosts, pumpkins, princesses, ninjas, all sneaking further and further onto the road, closer and closer to being in the parade themselves. It is a problem that blows up Mount Lebanon community group pages for days after, year after year. Whose fault is it that these kids keep getting so close to the parade? Why can't we put up barriers to keep them back?

Now, I understand the safety concerns and there is a limit. But, of course, the kids want to join the parade! Of course, ready in their costumes, they want to get as close as possible to the action! Our batmen and K-pop demon hunters would have loved Jesus' parade.

I mean, we continue to try to be a part of it today!

We wave our palms, march around the room, sing out our Hosannas. 2000 years later, we still want to join the parade. And Jesus' procession is a people's procession. There are no barriers holding them back.

But, let's back up for a moment.

Before the parade could begin, Jesus sent his disciples into a nearby village to get a colt that had never been ridden.

“If anyone asks why you are seemingly stealing this little donkey, just tell them, ‘The Lord needs it, and we’ll bring it back soon. Promise.’ And you shouldn’t have any trouble.” Jesus said.

Donkeys were the sedans of this time.

Jesus was telling his disciples to go steal a car for him—the keys would be in the ignition—and if any bystander had a problem with it, just promise it’s important and you’ll bring it back quickly.<sup>1</sup>

And it works.

This is one of those Bible stories that needs a warning: Please don’t try this at home.

The disciples put cloaks on a donkey, a makeshift throne of sorts. Maybe a makeshift booster seat, trying to make Jesus look more regal than a young, stolen donkey allows for on its

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Brobst-Renaud, “Mark 11:1-11, [14:3-9] Commentary,” Working Preacher, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/triumphal-entry-or-anointing-at-bethany-2/commentary-on-mark-111-11-143-9-3>, Accessed March 27, 2026.

own. And they begin trodding down from the Mount of Olives, into the valley, back up to the Temple Mount.

People quickly join in.

Throwing down their cloaks, cutting palm branches, creating a DIY red carpet.

The disciples don't hold them back. Another Gospel mentions children running the whole way into the Temple, continuing to shout hosannas! The priests clutched their pearls that Jesus would let children act up in such a way.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the city of peace, not flanked by soldiers but by little kids; not up on a warhorse, but low on a young donkey; not surrounded by wealth and prestige, but by ordinary people; not with praises of the status quo, but with shouts of, "Hosanna, save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"

Just like Pilate, this wasn't simply about holding a parade. It was political performance art with a message. A new King was coming. A new Kingdom was at hand. And everything was about to change.

**Love at Full Speed**

Except it doesn't. Not yet.

Jesus arrived at the Temple, but it was already late, so he went out to Bethany with his disciples.

No grand proclamation in the Temple. No flipping tables. No grand ritual or sacrifice fit for God's Son, no banquet of celebration fit for the King. The parade disperses. I wonder if one of the kids turned to a parent a little too loudly asking, "Is that it?"

Peace moves at a different pace than war.

The pace of the colt, of the small child, of people cutting down branches and lowering them to the ground. Jesus moved at the speed of love, not fear.

There is no conqueror's banquet because love cannot conquer. It can only compel.

Love at full speed is like the turtle marching forward step by step, undeterred, even as it seems it will never make it in time.

Jesus upends the expectations of the coming King.

He will not fight fire with fire, taking on Rome and the powers that be in Jerusalem on their terms. He will not have the people exchange palm branches for swords and cloaks for

armor. God's kingdom will not come through the bloodshed of God's enemies, not through vengeance or retribution, God's kingdom will come through love.

Love that does not cover in the face of threats. Love that does not put up barrier to who is included. Love that heads full speed into the heart of human cruelty, fear, and hatred.

One commentator wrote about this text, "Jesus chooses death because toning down God's healing love—to avoid death—is not an option for the Messiah. Jesus can only love at full speed. And Jesus knows that this same love will overcome death itself."<sup>2</sup>

### **Good News in Action**

Just over a month ago, a group of Buddhist monks arrived to a great crowd gathered in Washington, DC. Their journey began in Fort Worth, Texas and spanned 2300 miles and 108 days of walking, step by step, to the nation's capital.

The monk's leader, Venerable Bhikkhu Pannakara, told media outlets, "We are walking together on this path to find peace for ourself, to share that to our nation and the world...It's a

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<sup>2</sup> Ira Brent Driggers, "Mark 11:1-11 Commentary," Working Preacher, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/sunday-of-the-passion-palm-sunday-2/49620>, Accessed March 26, 2026.

spiritual offering, an invitation to live peace through everyday actions, mindful steps and open hearts.”<sup>3</sup>

This walk was not without risk.

Along the way, two of the monks were injured when their escort vehicle was hit by a truck, as they walked along the side of a highway.

The monks walked in heat, in rain, in sleet, and along icy pathways. They walked when no one watched, and when crowds of the curious and the supportive gathered. From October to February, they walked—with no legislative agenda, no fundraising QR code, no desire to own another side. They walked at the pace of love for the sake of peace.

Thousands welcomed them to DC. Buddhists, yes, but also Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, agnostics, atheists, a full spectrum of our religious plurality. Twenty thousand people from around the world watched via livestream as the monks reached their destination. There was no rally, no political speeches, no power grabs for anyone involved. It ended with an invitation to mindfulness, a practice of finding peace within yourself—what in our tradition we might call contemplative prayer, abiding, being attentive to the Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Associated Press, “Buddhist monks’ 15-week walk for peace ends in Washington, D.C.,” NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/10/g-s1-109416/buddhist-monks-finish-walk-for-peace>, Accessed March 27, 2026.

And that was it; they made their way back via bus to Texas.

### **Good News Inspires Us to Act**

Love parades through this world today.

Even as power processes, hatred marches, and fear moves at a staggering pace. Love is waving branches, dancing along another path, humorously and humbly trotting along on a donkey, taking one step at a time to cover the painstaking distance from conflict to peace. Love is bridging the gap within us, between us, and with our Creator.

And nothing—as the Apostle Paul writes—nothing, in all creation, will stop this love of Christ that heals us. Nothing can stop Christ turning the world upside down.

We have over these weeks of Lent, attended to the Good News. We have practiced attuning our hearts to hope, to joy, to faith that is alive and active.

This morning, I'm going to do something outside the norm of the Presbyterian church. Hear this as a gentle altar call, without the altar.

How now will the Good News inspire you to act?  
Will you join Jesus' parade?

Maybe in the past you were at the imperial procession, striving for status, pushing others down to get yourself to the top. But now—among the children shouting, the poor and powerless laying down what little they have, as the Prince of Peace invites you to join the parade...Now what will you do?

Not what will you believe. Not what will you say.

How will you be inspired to act now?

To live abundantly in your ordinary everyday life.

To be good news in the world.

To love at full speed.

My son loves to play rock, paper, scissors. But of course, in that game there is always a risk of losing. Rock is covered by paper; paper cut by scissors; scissors smashed by rock. Oscar has a workaround to this problem. He plays an indestructible object.

That is what God's love is like. And that is very good news. It is not easy to follow Jesus as he walks the path of love in Holy Week. We know there is risk, there is sacrifice, the inauguration of God's kingdom arrives on the cross.

But we also know where it ends.

It is the path of abundant, everlasting life. It is the path of peace.

So, may we have the courage to put one foot after another, laying down our fear, our anger, and our striving, and trusting in the good news of God's unstoppable love.

Amen.





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