

**Matthew 21:1-11**

21When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup>“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

<sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup>**When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”**

<sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## Intro

I want to speak with you from the heart today. I know we can spend a long time during this sermon talking about the prophetic traditions, the literary integrity, and the messianic hopes of the Palm Sunday story, and I'll be sure to allude to some of this today, but I'm feeling like maybe what we need more this morning is a chance to get honest with one another, and honest with ourselves.

The word 'turmoil' is defined as 'a state of great commotion, confusion, or disturbance; tumult; agitation; disquiet.'

And people are in different states of turmoil today. How many of **us** may describe parts of our lives as in commotion, confusion, or agitation?

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I met a young musician the other day who was **walking** across the country in an effort to find himself. That night we sat over dinner and drinks for **three hours** discussing his reservations with the institution of religion and his earnest attempts at finding where he fits into God's plans for the world.

There is a mother who has spent the past 18 years raising her child by herself, only to realize that next year when her son goes off to college, things won't ever be the same. She will be faced with a new world, with new opportunities, and new uncertainties.

**The past few months** have been filled with stories of nations who woke up one day to discover a political reality that just the **day before** seemed only like a dream. While there is joy and hope amongst their people, there is also fear of the unknown.

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We are members of a denomination that has been clinging to its prominent identity left over from the 1950's and 60's for half a century now. Yes, we are optimistic about the future, but we face declining membership, and conversations around topics that seem foreign to some of us. And while we may be positiveoptimistic, the future is up in the air.

Maybe **you're** personally in turmoil this morning. The security that was once assumed in your life is no longer available.

The family that was once so happy together is now broken.

Your understanding of the world as a 'good' place has been slowly destroyed with evil.

Your relationship with God, once vibrant and loving, is now distant.

We **all** deal with a certain amount of **turmoil** in our lives.

And what jumped out at me as I was meditating upon our Scripture reading for this morning was this simple word: turmoil. We've been taught as children to equate the Palm Sunday story with a joyous celebration. But let's re-examine this story today, and

pay special attention to some of the underlying emotions as we recount Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

### Scripture

Was this story in actuality really as glamorous as Matthew depicts? As children we were taught that Jesus' entry was like a giant parade! I pictured giant balloons and roaring crowds. I asked the preschoolers this week what they imagined, and they pictured Mickey Mouse there with a marching band!

And the story depicts Jesus fulfilling ~~the~~ [prophesies](#) of [Isaiah and Zechariah](#), although slightly misinterpreted, as the king rides triumphantly upon both a donkey and a colt. I have to ask myself, would Jesus want to create such a scene for himself? Is this some idea of proclaiming his royalty? And how many people were really there? Was the 'whole city' really paying attention?

Verses 8 thru 11 describe the scene in detail:

<sup>8</sup>A **very large crowd** spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>10</sup>**When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"**

<sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Other translations of the Bible for verse 10 say that the city was ‘stirred,’ ‘shaken,’ or ‘moved’ with allusions from the original Greek text to a **physical movement** like the earth trembling!:

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Most scholars, however, understand the role of our author Matthew was to write an account of such an occurrence that would align with the Jewish prophetic traditions with his target audience who were mostly Jews, as he careful includes ~~the~~ prophecies and imagery of the Jewish Messiah figure to victoriously enter into Jerusalem.

Maybe I’m a skeptic or a cynic, but I imagine this scene to be more awkward than anything. Here we have Jesus entering this large city, riding on a simple work animal, with his followers and a few onlookers celebrating his entry, while the rest of the city goes about its daily business.

And as ‘un-parade like’ as my imagination conjures this scene, I am even **more emotionally and spiritually moved**. The life and ministry of Jesus for me has never been about a grandiose lifestyle, or super-human feats. What **draws** me to Jesus as he enters Jerusalem is his humble nature and his quiet submission to God. What draws me to him this day is not his power and royalty. It’s his spiritual peace, even in the most uncertain of times.

**Yes, the city was in turmoil that day.** Most people were living with the same frustrations and uncertainties that **we face** today in our lives. [And if this wasn't enough, I imagine this experience to bring about even more turmoil in the lives of those around that special day.](#) I imagine his disciples not knowing quite what to expect upon their arrival in the big city. I imagine most onlookers with more questions than answers as they encounter this traveler riding into town. And I imagine Jesus quietly taking in this scene that is unfolding, understanding that he may not make it out of this city alive.

### **Response**

There is an author named Parker Palmer who wrote a book called 'Let Your Life Speak.' A personal joy of mine has been to re-read this book as I seek guidance and discernment in my own life at the ripe old age of 30. He writes about our ultimate quest as humans to discover our 'true self' amongst the turmoil of this world. It's not just about our individual identity, but our true self **interconnected** with the entire universe. The questions must be asked, 'Who am I?' and 'What is my nature?'

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And in the midst of this journey towards discovery, it is necessary to confront parts of our lives that we just rather soon forget. We must acknowledge our limitations, our fears, and our brokenness. As he quotes from the author Annie Dillard, the way to this discovery of the self is not 'up and away' towards abstraction, but 'down, and in' towards the depths of humanity—our sufferings, and our darkness.

He writes about this realization of the 'underground' as he battled with his own depression earlier in his life. Palmer writes, 'The underground is a dangerous but potentially life-giving place to which depression takes us; a place where we come to understand that the self is not set apart or special or superior but is a common mix of good and evil, darkness and light; a place where we can finally embrace the humanity we share with others' (pp. 69-70).

It's down there, in the dirt, that we are able to recognize our true selves, our humanity, and our relationship with one another—**true community**. This, as Palmer writes, is what the Christian message is all about: 'God made flesh.' We **experience the Divine** in the muck of humanity and our broken lives—in the turmoil.

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The Palm Sunday scene could have been a giant parade like we've been taught, or it could have been something more awkward and uncomfortable than anything. There could have been rumblings from the entire city, with people shouting, running; frantic at the sight of Jesus approaching. Or it could have also been quite uncertain; most people not knowing quite what to say or to do, as this man arrives riding in on a donkey.

Turmoil is like this. Sometimes you can be filled with angst, extreme emotion; like your world is about to boil over! Other times you may be going through your days simply unable to come up with a clear explanation—for anything.

The Good News is that God uses this turmoil in our lives to shape us into a better image of our Creator. We celebrate the fact today that God enters into darkness, into our depression and failures, into our brokenness and disconnection with the world, and God did so in the flesh. This is not some abstract concept that we need to make sure we have all the right answers for; there is no test to see whether or not we are the Christians with all of the answers.

What Jesus did on that day, what we celebrate this Palm Sunday, is God entering into our lives, not as some all-powerful emperor or royalty, but as a gentle man who points to God and says, 'I want all of you. I want your questions, your doubts, your fears, your [secrets that you're afraid to tell even your best friends](#)~~fears~~. And I want you to walk with me, and **with everyone else here who is walking with me**, and I want you to follow me to the cross.'

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Yes, there is turmoil in our lives today as we journey to the cross. But we are also a people who share in the Good News of God's [entering into our lives](#)~~faith~~, [in God's saving love](#), and [God's](#) resurrection.