

Triumphal Entry

When I was a kid, Palm Sunday was a huge deal. As a little kid sometimes you were given a palm branch to wave that Sunday on quo, but also at some very inopportune times. A palm branch could be a **sword, an oar, or a baseball bat**. Don't judge, I was a kid. Sometimes we would **make paper palm branches** to wave. We would read today's story, which is called **The Triumphal entry**.

Imagine my surprise when I look at the different versions of this story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. **Matthew's version** is the most often read. It is longer than the others, giving more detail. **I've preached on that** one several times, I'm sure. **Mark was the one originally on our schedule**, but it is very much bare bones. **That left me with Luke**, which had something different from the others. **So, I pulled the trigger** and started working on it. The surprise is that Luke only has them **throwing the cloaks** in front of Jesus, **not the waving on palm branches**. No palm branches, suddenly my childhood memory was ruined.

There's another problem with all three versions. It's what the story was named or branded after the fact. And yes, **Jesus will be triumphant later**. Now he's a **rabbi on a donkey**. The image of a triumphal entry was that the **conquering General, or King, would enter the gate of the defeated city** where its dignitaries would bend a knee to their conqueror. He would come on a **war horse, a mighty steed**. That is the one who has triumphed **gets to receive the unconditional surrender of the city** as the dignitaries fall on their faces groveling for their lives. **That is not the picture Luke is describing, palm branches or no palm branches**.

²⁸After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. ²⁹As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. ³⁰“Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. ³³And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?”

³⁴And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. This is tantamount to **borrowing someone's car without money down**. A donkey was worth a lot.

³⁶As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. ³⁷When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

³⁸“Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” ³⁹But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”

⁴⁰He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!” Luke 19:28-40

If you didn't already know, we have been reading through the **Bible Chronologically**. We have been in the **New Testament which is the Jesus part of the Bible**. Since it's chronological, you get

some of the **stories rapid fire in multiple gospel writers**; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We have seen **Jesus heal people, walk on water, feed 5000 people** with a kid's lunch, teach about the Kingdom of God over and over. **There are lots of turning points** where Jesus reveals something about himself. **He shows that he is Lord over the elements** by walking on the water. He refers to himself as **the bread of life** or heaven comparing himself to the manna coming down from heaven. **And then he tells them that they need to eat his flesh and drink his blood** if they want to be his disciples. **That was a real turning point** because a bunch of people tapped out. He has even **raised his friend, Lazarus**, from the dead just a few miles from where he is entering into Jerusalem. And look, the crowds are back following him into the city.

This story begins his final days when the crowds will leave. There will be **only two choices** concerning Jesus. **He will make sure of that.** You either **follow him as king** or you **go back to the way your life has been** and completely forget about this rabbi who you thought might be the one. Now there is this last one. **Before it's too late to be a hanger oner, part of the entourage.** It's all in or not at all.

This is the fork in the road.

Yogi Berra, the hall of fame Yankee catcher and manager, once said, **“When you come to the fork in the road, take it.”** Clearly it doesn't work that way. You take one of the paths in front of you when you come to that fork in the road. It's one or the other. **Jesus has forced them to choose which side they are on.**

His actions now force a decision. A dividing line. It's like the **continental divide**. This is the line where water flows one way or the other, east or west. **There isn't a third option.**

Jesus has created friction between what they have seen in the story thus far and what they are seeing right now. What they have seen thus far from Jesus can be put into the **old story about the kind of Messiah or king** they are expecting. **From this point on they will have to choose between their old story and the one Jesus is acting out in front of them coming into town on a donkey.** Can I **push through**, particularly when the crowds **stop cheering**? It's not very long after that the crowd turns.

The kingdom is Upside down and backwards, therefore, so is the king.

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. ²¹ Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne. Revelation 3:20

This is what a king looks like, this is what power looks like.

This is not the typical triumphal entry, A triumphal entry is when the **victorious king** is entering the city after conquering it. **Or he returns from defeating his enemies to his capital where the people are celebrating** by welcoming him as the conquering hero. **He has brought them honor and made them victorious** because he was victorious.

It's kind of like a victory parade. If the lions were to win the super bowl, this very thing would happen in Detroit. There would be a parade with the players and coaches carrying the trophy as crowds of people line the parade route cheering and celebrating. At some point, the parade would

stop and there would be a **big rally where players and coaches would give speeches about the victory in the Super Bowl** as the crowds go crazy. Then they will talk about doing this again next year. **The lions have conquered the National Football League, they are the winners. The lions won, therefore. they won.**

The crowds in this story, which we know will make a different choice later at this fork in the road, believe that **their king will demonstrate power over their enemies, the Romans.** This **Messiah King is entering Jerusalem like that kind of king** with that kind of power. And because this king demonstrates that kind of military/political power **that means these people will be a part of something powerful.** They **won't get pushed around** or marginalized by Rome or anyone else going forward.

Here's why Jesus' actions demand a decision. He is fulfilling prophecy, not their expectation for what a king and power look like. Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt. ¹⁰I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.^[h] Zechariah 9:9-10

They pass the mount of Olives...messianic reference where he will appear in Zechariah 14:4-5 Then the Lord will go out to fight against those nations, as he has fought in times past. ⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:3-4a

They might have this prophecy in mind, but Jesus is fulfilling this in a different way from what they expected. Maybe the crowds are looking up at the Mount of Olives and think about Jesus in this way, not humbly entering on a donkey.

This is the kind of king that rules the kind of kingdom he has been presenting all through his ministry. Jesus is the king who restores all things, puts things right, back to the garden. This is an eternal king with an eternal kingdom. The other kind always has a shelf life. **Victory parades don't last, nor do kingdoms based upon this type of power.**

Here's a couple of ways to **describe the kind of king Jesus is and what his power looks like.**¹⁶ “So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.” Matthew 20:16 **The power that Jesus has comes from being last** or what the world calls losing. The great golfer **Tiger Woods** used to call coming in second, “first loser.”

²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:27 **The powerful person is the one who waits tables** at the fancy restaurant, not the one who buys 100.00 steak dinners.

The real question for the crowds who are at this fork in the road is, **“Can you handle this type of king with this kind of power?”** The question is the **same for you and me,** can you handle this type of King?

At this fork in the road, this guy on the donkey entering humbly into the city is **not a victim**. Jesus is the director of these events. If you read it, not knowing the end, **it would appear like Jesus is being swept away** by events that are out of his control. He is powerless to the moving of the crowd, the religious leaders, the empire of Rome.

Jesus' makes it clear that things aren't happening to him, he is making things happen. ⁸ No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded." John 10:18 He is the kind of king that **unleashes his power through sacrificing himself for others**.

Can they handle this type of king? For most of the crowd the answer is no. Can you handle this type of a king?

There is a clue to how the crowd is going to change. If you read this quickly it **sounds like the crowd is singing about Jesus**. But really the Disciples are the source of praise...**The crowd simply joins in**.

Back to verse 37. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, **all of his followers** began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. ³⁸ "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" Luke 19:37-38

They are loosely quoting this psalm. Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. Psalm 118:26

Are we waiting around for the crowd, the culture to start cheering what Jesus is doing in this world? We start it. We don't wait for things to change around us. No one wants to be the first to start singing **happy birthday** to a crowd. This is what we used to teach our student leaders in the youth ministry in Alma. **"Leaders do it first." Particularly if it's hard obedience.**

Story of a young man whose **family is falling apart in 1980's Ireland**. There are **no jobs** and very little hope, and **mom and dad are getting a divorce**. Each day there are **ferries full of people leaving for London** to find a new life. They have money problems. **His sister is going to "uni" and his older brother** seems to just lay around the house listening to music, getting high, wasting his life away. Though most of you **don't believe that the brother is anything more than a pathetic clown** as a slideshow for your amusement. The younger brother **starting a rock and roll band** in the face of **leaving the nice school to go to the worst school in town** is the real hero focal point of the story.

As the story progresses the older brother uses his extensive knowledge of music and his collection of records to encourage and coach his young sibling as he begins to **write and create music** with his little band of misfits.

The story comes to a climax as the younger brother and his band have their first concert at a school dance where they **"stick it to the man"** with songs that condemn the cruel headmaster of their school. **Which leads to a plan for the younger brother to escape across the channel to London** with his love interest in his grandfather's fishing boat. **Before leaving, his older brother gives him the encouragement** he needs to sing his songs, and leave for London with no money or

prospects to become a rock and roll star. **It is at this point that the brother reveals that he has stuck around not so that he could eventually get out of this terrible family and economic situation. but so that he could help his little brother escape.** He was the anti-hero. **And the movie was never about rock and roll, it was about an older brother** leading the way for his younger brother in an unexpected way. **In his final speech** to his little brother, he describes how he remained here as a way of **hacking through the jungle with a machete to make a way** for his little brother to escape. It was all about remaining at home to protect and propel his little brother on his way in life.

We are the one's hacking through the jungle, giving praise to God who has come for the people we pave the way for.

Can you give him praise or are you looking for it? Judgment on Israel's rejection of Jesus.

In Luke's version, he records this interaction between Jesus and some Pharisees. ³⁹But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" ⁴⁰He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" Luke 19:39-40 In other words, **he is agreeing with what they are saying.** If they don't praise God for sending him into this snake pit that is Jerusalem then rocks, tree's building will do it. **What Jesus is doing, creation has been waiting for, the beginning of putting everything right, that sin has ruined.** It's like the **sun setting at night.** Jesus was going to be praised as he enters Jerusalem.

Picking up at verse 42. ⁴¹But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. ⁴²"How I wish today that you of all people would understand **the way** to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. ⁴⁴They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you." Luke 19:41-44

Like I said, this is a fork in the road and the people of Jerusalem for the most part are going to take the choice that takes them away from what God is doing in the world. **Notice how he says, "the way to peace."** The way to peace with God is through the one who comes humbly on a donkey into the City of God where the temple stands to give his life. **There are two paths** there, to join King Jesus in a different kind of kingdom or not. **Just two options.**

Part of Jesus' judgment is that now what they were able to see and not choose will cause them to not get a second chance to choose. He knew that there would be within the **Jewish leadership a conspiracy to hide what Jesus had done** and discredit the reality of his resurrection. **The truth will now be hidden from them. The train has left the station. It is too late.**

While it is hidden to those who refused to see, now this kingdom will be opened up to all people. There used to be **two kinds of people like our fork in the road with two choices.** There were **Jews and everyone else,** regardless of genetics, culture, history, skin tone, language, are gentiles. There was **clean and dirty.** There was **close to God** and then there was **separation from God.** ¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not

support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and **you stand by faith**. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Romans 11:17-21 (NIV)

God did spiritual surgery on the tree of life to graft you and I into it through Jesus. **This is the culmination of the covenant** God made back near the beginning of the book with Abraham. He said that his family, which would become the nation of Israel, would be his people, he would be their God exclusively, they would get a homeland and that God would use them to bless all people. **This is what is happening here.**

The road is hard for those who choose to continue to follow. The road for those who reject will be **easy because they will be in the majority**. They continue in the old story they have been living. **People aren't going to cheer us on. But we have been grafted into the root and we will grow into something that will bless all people. We are the ones hacking through the jungle to make a way for many others.**

The thing about this fork in the road that Jesus has brought us to is that the path he takes is narrow, the one the crowds will take is wide and smooth. If you want less resistance, then take that one. ¹³“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell^[a] is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Matthew 7:13-14

We will choose the narrow gate, knowing that a narrow path with Jesus protecting and guiding us is better than a wide path that I take alone that leads to destruction.

Can you handle a savior who only expects everything? No halfway. Choose his path, putting your life in his hands. **There's not riding the fence**, that gets you cut up with barbed wire. **You're being poured out on the continental divide**, which direction will your life take toward Jesus or in the opposite direction.

Steps of Obedience

1. Confess your desire for a savior not a king. Particularly not the kind of king Jesus establishes himself as in this passage.

I want us to go into a **corporate time of prayer**. This is our time of confession. **Confess anything that needs to get out of the way between you and God**. Then there's a **deeper confession of our desire to be our own king relegating Jesus to savior only**. But that's another one of those forks in the road, he can't be savior if he isn't king. **That's not a choice that the gospel allows**. Jesus is the dividing line, and he is both because he is both King and Savior. His kind of power to save can only be accessed by those who put their complete trust in him.

1. Choose the narrow gateway.

No one can stand there at the fork. As Yogi Berra said you must take it. Left or right. Wide or narrow. **It's like voting: you can choose a candidate or not vote.** But if you don't vote that means you have chosen the winner by default.

I believe that there are people listening today that have never really chosen the narrow gate, the narrow path that is Jesus. You come to church because you like it or maybe you have friends here. You watch it on TV because there is something that you like about it. **But you really want things to stay the same as those crowds** who cheered for a moment but when things didn't go as they expected they walked directly into the wide path. **Today is your day.**