

March 20, 2016  
Jesus!  
*Jesus Arrived!*  
Matthew 21:1-11

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. What have you done this week? Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning.

This is Palm Sunday, and this is the day we remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem on a humble animal. Laura Gale once said, "*Palm Sunday is like a glimpse of Easter. It's a little bit joyful after being somber during Lent.*" The events of Palm Sunday are recorded in all four Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Our Gospel lesson today is Matthew's version. Let me call this message *Jesus Arrived!*

**Matthew 21:1-11** <sup>1</sup>As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> "Say to Daughter Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

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

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A missionary society once wrote the famous missionary David Livingstone a letter. They wanted to send him help, so they asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't

want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all." What was Livingstone saying? He was only looking for the truly committed, and so is Jesus. The question is, how committed are you to Jesus? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

According to the text, a great crowd had gathered in the city of Jerusalem. It was time for the Passover. The law required the people to attend, but no legislation was necessary. Everyone wanted to be part of the great holiday. It was a time to do three things. First, they made their annual animal sacrifice at the temple. Second, they paid their annual taxes. Third, it was a time to reconnect with family and friends. It is for that reason everyone wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. It has been estimated that the population of Jerusalem swelled to 2,500,000 on that particular Passover, and the name on the lips of everyone was Jesus. You know the story.

Jesus rode into the city on a donkey to describe something that he could not communicate. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. The people celebrated his Messiahship. However, it is at this point the story begins to dim. Some in the crowd came because they wanted to see a celebrity. Some in the crowd came because they had a problem Jesus could fix. Some in the crowd came because they had grown tired of foreign domination. They wanted a Messiah that would lead a great revolution. Their expectations of the Messiah and the reality of the Messiah could not coexist.

Each one of the Gospel writers emphasizes the size of the crowd. Matthew calls it a very large crowd (Matthew 21:8). Mark says many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut palm branches from nearby fields. Some people followed Jesus; some people ran ahead of Jesus (Mark 11:8-9). Luke says the crowd was so great the religious leaders encouraged Jesus to rebuke them (Luke 19:39). John tells us a great crowd had gathered for the festival (John 12:12). All the Gospel writers tell us the crowd cheered for Jesus when he entered Jerusalem. You can't question the fact that the crowd was large. You can't question the fact that Jesus was the eye of the storm on that first Palm Sunday. However, you can question the commitment of the crowd. In the end, the cheers of Palm Sunday were replaced with the tears of Good Friday. The massive Palm Sunday crowd disappeared. The crowd was large, but the crowd wasn't committed.

It was the crowd that grabbed my attention as I prepared for this morning's message. What caused the crowd to abandon Jesus? One thing is clear. The problem was not Jesus. The Master was consistent throughout the week. The problem was the crowd itself. There were many reasons why the crowd abandoned Jesus. Today, I want to look at three of the most obvious. I would like to say those reasons died with Jesus's generation, but I can't. People are still walking away from Jesus for the same reasons. I hope that isn't your story. As we begin our annual Holy Week pilgrimage, I hope you are truly committed to Jesus. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Trendy**

This is reason number one. Some found themselves in the crowd on that first Palm

Sunday because Jesus was a celebrity. Let us call these people "trendy". What does trendy mean? It means fashionable. The name on everyone's lips that day was Jesus. Why was Jesus so popular? Jesus was popular because Jesus was known as a miracle worker. Everyone knew the stories. Because of Jesus the blind could see, the lame could walk, the deaf could hear and the demoniacs were made whole. However, according to the Gospel of John, the greatest miracle was the resurrection of Lazarus. I can't say this too strongly. Jesus was a celebrity! Trendy people wanted to be near Jesus because Jesus was fashionable. Do you know any trendy disciples?

Years ago, my brother-in-law introduced me to the term "C and E People." You know who C and E People are. They are the people who only come to church on Christmas and Easter. They make up a significant number. We experience it here at Western Reserve. Our average weekly worship attendance is about 240 people. On Christmas Eve we welcomed nearly 600. Next week is Easter and we should welcome close to 500. Some of the people we see next week will not be seen again until December 24. That isn't being mean; that is being honest. Don't get me wrong. I am always glad to see the C and E People. However, I have to make a confession: I worry about them because there is more to Jesus than his birth and his resurrection. It bothers me that they have so little exposure to Jesus. However, it doesn't seem to bother them. Do you think they will come to church next week to learn about Jesus? Or do you think they will come to church next week for other reasons? Do you know of anyone who comes to church on Christmas and Easter because it is fashionable? Then you know a trendy disciple. Someone once said, *"You can be committed to a church and not be committed to Jesus. But you can't be committed to Jesus without a church."* If you know a trendy disciple, then say, **"Amen!"**

### **Users**

This is reason number two. Some found themselves in the crowd on that first Palm Sunday because they needed something from Jesus. The Master healed many people, but Jesus didn't heal everyone. There was no shortage of suffering in their world. They heard Jesus was coming and they had someone in their life who needed to be healed. Everyone knew someone who needed help. They came because, maybe Lady Luck might smile on them. It was like playing the lottery. You can't win if you don't play. You can't really blame them. Jesus was their only hope. Do you know of anyone who has ever tried to use Jesus for a personal favor? Do you know of anyone who has ever tried to bargain with God? Do you know of anyone who is mad at God? They would like God if God did things their way.

Tomorrow afternoon, I will take Kathryn and our three Russian visitors to the airport. Their time with us has gone fast and the trip was successful. Stas got his leg and Kolya got his repairs. They have seen many Americans and many Americans have seen them. Many have been curious about them and asked questions. One person felt like it was his duty to make a statement. People are always saying odd things to me. This person was no exception. This person said, "They are an example of why I don't go to church. Why would a loving God create handicapped people?" I didn't respond because I was

clueless about what to say. I guess, he was saying he would go to church if God gave him what he wanted. Can I ask you a question? We live in such arrogant times. Why are there so many people who think God has to live up to their expectations? Why are there so many who are mad at God? They can be mad at God. The truth is, God doesn't care. Never forget it. God is God! It is God who sets the agenda and creates the venue. We are nothing more than nameless characters on the stage of world history. If you know of someone who tries to use God, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Misinformed**

This is reason number three. Some found themselves in the crowd on that first Palm Sunday because they were misinformed. One of the reasons this scene is so loved is that it is easy to imagine. If you use your sanctified imagination, you can picture Jesus riding into Jerusalem on that simple animal. However, while it is easy to imagine the scene, it is hard to completely understand the scene. For to completely understand the scene, you must understand the politics of that day. (Does anyone here understand the politics of our day?) The politics of that day revolved around foreign domination. The Roman Empire had come to their little corner of the world and oppressed the people. The Jews hated the Romans. They prayed for their liberation and longed to be rescued. They prayed that God would respond and send them a Messiah. They hoped Jesus was that political Messiah. They wanted Jesus to lead a political revolution. They wanted Jesus to be a political Messiah, so they did political things. They waved palm branches like he was a conquering military warrior. They yelled political slogans: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel! The problem was, he was not a political Messiah. Jesus has never been interested in politics. That section of the crowd was misinformed. He was a spiritual Messiah. Do you know of any misinformed disciples?

Don't be misinformed. Jesus was not just one more historical religious figure in history. Jesus was completely different. Jesus was the incarnation of God himself. That is why we celebrate Christmas. God became one of us, and He never committed a single sin. Your understanding of sacrificial theology may be thin, but get this point. The sinlessness of Jesus made him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. The sinlessness of Jesus made him the perfect sacrifice for your sins. Let me tell you one more time. You can't earn your salvation. It is a great gift from God. We are saved by grace and by grace alone! The only way to say, "Thank you" to Jesus for dying for your sins is to be like Jesus. I hope you are a little more like Jesus every day! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

There was a great crowd on that Palm Sunday. The numbers were impressive, but the numbers really didn't matter. Jesus wasn't interested in the crowd. Jesus was interested in the committed. This is the question we all must answer: how committed are you? Rick Warren once said, *"Nothing will shape your life more than the commitments you make."* May God be with us as we begin this Holy Week. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**