

Mark 11:1-11, Zechariah 9: 9-10

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a well-known part of the story of Christ. It's the beginning of the Passion story – the beginning of Christ's last week before he is crucified, one week before his resurrection.

This was the time of Passover, a huge festival for Jewish people dating back to when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. In the first century when Jesus was alive, Jewish families would have come from all over the region to Jerusalem for this holiday. It was a big deal. The population of Jerusalem in the early part of the first century is estimated to have been roughly 40,000. During Passover it swelled to 200,000. But this Passover was different. There was electricity in the air because Jesus was coming. Jesus was of the house of David, born in Bethlehem. He had been performing miracles all over Galilee and Judea, was teaching crowds that were getting bigger and bigger, and he was proclaimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. As Jesus and his disciples were making their way to Jerusalem from Galilee, the crowd following him was growing.

And he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. Why a donkey? For three reasons:

- 1) In ancient times, when a King entered a city on a donkey, it was a symbol that he was coming in peace.
- 2) King Solomon, the son of King David, entered Jerusalem on a donkey when he first became King.
- 3) The book of Zechariah, written about 500 years earlier, prophesies the coming of the Lord with "See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly, and riding on a donkey ... He will proclaim peace to the nations."

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the people lay their cloaks and branches on the path before him. His followers at this stage were a massive crowd entering the city, waving branches and yelling, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

It would have been quite the parade. But it wasn't the only parade to enter Jerusalem that Passover. The day before, Pilate had entered Jerusalem in a big grand parade. Pilate's entry is not recorded in the Bible, but we know that this happened because it's well documented in other historic sources from the time. You see, Pilate didn't live in Jerusalem. His court and palace were in Caesarea Maritima on the coast. Because Passover was a big deal, with hundreds of thousands descending upon Jerusalem, Pilate would bring a huge force to Jerusalem to ensure that the crowds didn't rise up. He would stay in Jerusalem for the week and then return to Caesarea.

Pilate's entry into Jerusalem would have been quite a spectacle to behold as well. You would have heard the beating of the drums, and the marching of the soldiers from

miles away. Hundreds of soldiers would have entered Jerusalem. The first few legions would have been on foot, their boots ringing off the paving stones in perfect unison as they marched. Their leather armor would have been polished and shining, their brass reflecting the sun, and close to the front one of the Centurions would have been carrying a large staff with a golden eagle on top, the symbol of the Roman Empire. Behind the foot soldiers would have been soldiers on horseback. Then, somewhere near the middle, would have been Pilate himself, on a massive warhorse, his bronze helmet decorated with a large red plume.

This parade would have been an impressive projection of power. And when there is a display of power, it's hard to look away. It's hard not to be impressed. The people watching Pilate's parade would have had a mixture of awe and fear. Jesus' entrance on a donkey, therefore, would have been a huge contrast! No leather armor, no shiny metal, no golden eagle ... a totally different parade, a totally different feeling, and a totally different king. There's Jesus in his typical peasant garments, riding on a donkey, his followers waving palm branches, and cheering and singing!

So, the question we have to ask ourselves is this, **which parade would you have watched?** Which parade would have moved you more? Which King would you have followed, and which King would you have served? It's easy to sit in this church this morning and think, "Of course we would have followed Christ!". But the truth is ... it's not so easy when you are there, watching the two contrasting parades live as they happen. Because a massive and obvious show of power is compelling!

In Politics 101, you learn that the study of politics is the study of power. I've been involved in and around politics for a decade now, and I've had the chance to meet the kind of people who are attracted to politics. Politics attracts many types, and if I can simplify things, there are three types of people attracted to politics. The first type are the people who go into politics for what I call the "right reasons". The type that wants to help and better their community. Those politicians do exist, believe it or not!

I'm going to give you an example of a couple of politicians who got into politics for the right reasons, and you'll be surprised on both counts. The first is our former MP, Gord Brown. Yes, Conservative Gord Brown, even though, as many of you know, I'm a Liberal, I count Gord as one of the few politicians who were there for the right reasons. Gord genuinely loved our area and did his best to help the people of this riding. He was a good constituency MP. And even though I'm a Liberal and ran in a nomination race to run against Gord, he and I were friends. We'd call each other up every couple of months and arrange a coffee or a drink. A couple of times I was on the Hill in Ottawa and sent him a text, and we'd meet up. I hung out with Gord in his parliamentary office. And Gord and I shared something in common: we were both Masons. And while we disagreed on many political issues, we regarded each other as brothers.

Second example, and this one might get some of you angry, and remember I'm talking about the person not the policies – it's Kathleen Wynne. I'll never forget when I first met her. She was getting off a bus at the Brockville Convention Center. I was there with David Henderson, who was mayor of Brockville at the time. We were hosting David's nomination to be the Liberal candidate in the lead-up to the 2018 election. But a group of protesters showed up at the Convention Center — residents of Edwardsburg Cardinal were there to protest a proposed mega-dump that was to be built just north of Cardinal. I was the campaign manager for David Henderson and was organizing this entire event that included the Premier of Ontario! This was a big deal, but these protesters were loud and a huge annoyance for me! I was worried that they were going to steal the media spotlight and possibly ruin the entire event.

Kathleen Wynn got off the bus, shook David's hand, and then she turned and walked right over to this group of protesters, her OPP detail trailing close behind. I admit, I was surprised! One of her staffers leaned in and said to me, "Don't worry, she always does this — anytime there's a protest, Kathleen wants to talk with them." It completely diffused the situation, and the protesters were surprised and impressed that the Premier of Ontario came to meet with them and hear what they had to say. Kathleen promised to follow up with Steve Clark on the issue, and as it turns out, that mega-dump never got built. Later, I found out from Kathleen herself that her first political involvement was protesting cuts to Education during the Mike Harris government. So, it was always important for her to hear what the protesters had to say.

I met her again a year later. By then she was no longer Premier. She spent her last four years as a backbench MPP representing her riding. There was no longer an OPP detail surrounding her, no longer an entourage of staffers following her everywhere, just her. She came to Brockville for the opening of Pride Week, and I had the opportunity to have dinner with her and her partner at Moose McGuire's in the Tall Ships. It was a rare opportunity to spend an entire evening with a former Premier, chatting about politics and policy, and I have to tell you, she's the real deal! She was open and honest about her mistakes as Premier, her mistakes in the 2018 election, but also proud of a lot of the accomplishments she'd achieved. I found out that she's a very strong and active member of the United Church and had been long before she entered politics. That's something we had in common. In fact, it was her United Church community in Toronto that helped her come out of the closet and to be her true self, and eventually meet the love of her life. She got into politics for the right reasons. And it's okay to disagree with her policy choices, that's what democracy is all about, but she herself is a good person.

The second type of people who are attracted to politics are the **people who are attracted to power**. I would say when you meet people on Parliament Hill, the politicians and the staffers, the majority fall into this category: they are attracted to power. And when you walk the halls of Parliament, it is awe inspiring! I've had the

privilege of walking through Parliament a few times in my life, and it is impressive! The amazing stone carvings! The portraits of past Prime Ministers hanging on the walls! The MPs walking around quickly carrying folders, chatting with their staffers, the parade of the Speaker of the House every day that Parliament sits — the pomp and ceremony as they open Parliament, and place a beautiful and ornate golden mace, symbolic of the authority of the Crown on the proceedings of Parliament. That's why these 20-somethings work crazy hours for MPs and Senators on the Hill. To be close to power can be intoxicating. And I admit, I have felt that.

But there's nothing worse than the 3rd type of politician – those who use power for their own personal gain or need to control. And they often do this by projecting and spreading fear. They are rare, and they are attracted to politics for the wrong reasons. **Vladimir Putin** is an example of the worst kind of politician. He stays in power because the people around him are afraid of him. Anyone who has tried to oppose Putin over the years was either run out of Russia, their wealth, and assets seized by the state, or he had them killed.

But **Christ is a different kind of King**. Just like his parade into Jerusalem 2000 years ago, Christ offers us a choice: Follow him or follow the powers that be. And it is a stark contrast.

- He's humble – dressed as a commoner, dressed like you and me.
- He's riding a donkey because he is the Prince of Peace.
- He brings and spreads joy and excitement!
- And everyone around him feels compelled to wave palm branches – a symbol of victory.

The last point I want to make is about Christ's victory. The waving of palm branches on that first Palm Sunday 2000 years ago foreshadowed his victory a week later when he walked out of the tomb. The Powers that be – Rome at the time, crucified him. But Christ was victorious! He defeated death! He defeated fear! And he brought the hope of salvation and eternal life to the world!

That was Christ's first parade. When Christ comes again, it'll be a victory parade. And he will come in power. Until that day comes, we have a choice to make — do we follow Christ, or do we follow the current powers that be in our world? There is a major truth in our world when it comes to Christ: you can choose to follow him; you can choose to reject him; but there's one thing you can't do — you can't ignore him. No one can. They couldn't ignore him when he rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, and no one can ignore him today. That's the impact he has on this world, and that's the choice he presents to all of us.

This week, this holy week that's ahead of us, reflect on the person of Christ — who he is, and the choice he is presenting you. And if you choose Christ, you'll be on the winning side. **Thanks be to God, Amen**