

Introduction:

Jesus' public ministry was only about three years. That's roughly one thousand days. Today, we'll be accompanying Jesus as we go through each day in his final week on earth. The writers of the four biographies of Jesus, or the Gospels – the writers definitely thought this final week was of great importance. Matthew devotes about 30 percent of his story of Jesus' life to the last six days. Mark dedicates about 40 percent of his story of Jesus' life to these last six days. Luke allocates 20 percent. John devotes the largest percentage of the four writers: 47 percent of John's Gospel covers the last week of Jesus' life. Basically, the writers of Jesus' biographies considered this final week to be critical for us to understand or they would not have given it so much emphasis in their writings.

Today, we will start our journey with Jesus as he and his disciples enter into Jerusalem. Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover; the celebration that commemorated the exodus from Egypt when the angel of death passed over the homes of the Hebrew people. As you may remember, this was the event that finally changed the heart of the Egyptian Pharaoh so he would let the Hebrew people leave their Egyptian slavery.

The celebration of the Passover was one of the major religious holidays in the life of the Hebrew people. Many people came from all over the known world to Jerusalem for the celebration. It is estimated that there would be more than 200,000 people in the town. If you've been to Jerusalem and know where the old city walls are, you wonder how all of those people could fit into such a small space!

Jesus came to Jerusalem from Jericho and probably ate dinner the night before entering Jerusalem at Mary and Martha's home in the town of Bethany. On Sunday morning, Jesus entered Jerusalem for the Passover. Five days later he would be put to death: death on a cross like a common criminal.

Today, we are worshipping God as we always do through music, the word preached and the scriptures read – though the format will be different from our normal worship. We begin our worship today as we prepare our hearts and minds to worship our great God by listening to Charlton's organ prelude.

Let us worship God!!

First Meditation

That was exciting! Jesus riding into Jerusalem and all the people praising him, laying their cloaks in front of him – creating a pathway of honor. Hosanna in the highest! What praise and tribute to Jesus! Jesus comes riding triumphantly into Jerusalem!

Did you ever wonder why Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem? If you think about it, the Bible has never said that Jesus rode a donkey to the next village. He was always walking. In fact, he just finished a 90 mile walk from Galilee to Jerusalem. So, why in the world would he ask for a donkey to ride into Jerusalem?

We know that donkeys were much more sure footed than horses in the rocky, hilly terrain in the southern part of Israel and could go a lot further than horses on less water. The Bible tells us that King David rode a donkey. It was the beast Hebrew kings rode. Since this was the time Jesus was to be celebrated as a king, perhaps that's why he chose to ride a donkey.

But there's also another reason. That has to do with a prophecy of the prophet Zechariah recorded 500 years before the time of Christ. Zechariah 9:9 - **Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,**

humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The people had heard this scripture read in synagogue many times and knew the prophecy. With this one simple action of riding on a donkey, Jesus was telling the people that he was the long-awaited king, the Messiah. Jesus was no longer keeping it a secret that he was the Messiah.

There were two other royal processions coming into Jerusalem that day. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of the area, was entering the city, with probably 1000 or so soldiers in chariots, on horseback and on foot. With this show of force, Pilate wanted everyone to know who was in charge and that he didn't want any disturbances during the festival. And if there were any, he would squelch them quickly with force.

The other royal procession was King Herod Antipas. He ruled over territories to the north of Jerusalem. It was he who had ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. King Herod Antipas' father was the one who had built up the Temple to its grand state. King Herod Antipas, like his father the Great King Herod, was known for violence. His parade and show of military force indicated that he, like Pilate, didn't want any trouble in the city during the celebration of the Passover.

The contrast is striking. Pilate and Herod Antipas came willing to kill to hold power. Their show of force certainly sent that message to the people. Jesus, on the other hand, led a motley crew of followers who brandished palm branches, not swords. Jesus' power came from loving others, not from threats. Jesus gave life, Herod Antipas and Pilate, death.

On Monday, Jesus cleared the Temple of merchants and money changers saying, **My house was designated a house of prayer for the nations; You've turned it into a hangout for thieves.** Much money was made by the merchants and the high priest from the businesses in the Temple. Jesus had disrupted business during one of the most lucrative weeks of the year. Consider Jesus' action as equivalent to closing down the mall in Palm Desert the week before Christmas. That would create quite a disturbance.

Jesus' action sealed his fate. From that time on, the religious elite looked for a way to disgrace Jesus or get rid of him permanently.

On Tuesday, Jesus began teaching in the Temple courts telling parables as he normally did. However, at this point in the week, he knew his fate was sealed so he began to openly criticize the religious leaders. Perhaps he was trying to get through to them what their behavior was really doing to the people they were supposedly taking care of.

The story of the owner of the vineyard who leased the vineyard out was a direct criticism of the religious elite. They were to take care of the people, but instead, they, like the vineyard renters took care of themselves. The vineyard owner sent servants to collect the rent but they were killed by the tenants. Likewise, God sent prophets to the Hebrew people. The religious elite killed them because they didn't like it that the prophets' messages were spoken against them. Like the vineyard owner, God finally sent his son, thinking he would be listened to. But he wasn't. They would kill him, too, as they killed the prophets.

How did the religious elite react when Jesus told this parable? Mark 12:12 says: **When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.** The religious elite wanted to do the same thing to Jesus that they had done to all the prophets that God sent before him. Nothing changed. The religious elite seemed blind to what they were doing – protecting the status quo even though the status quo was not honoring God.

There's a lesson here for us who are vested in the system. We want to protect the status quo. I see this in organizations I belong to. We see this in church. People like things the way they are and don't

want to change. If new ideas are brought forward, the messenger is killed. The idea is quickly discredited. Being open to change, to the Holy Spirit's guidance, is not always easy. We like things the way they are. Too many churches are dying today because people protect the status quo.

Something for you to think about this week: would you have recognized Jesus as the Messiah when he walked the earth or would you have been vested in the system and fought him – ultimately eliminating him.

Second Meditation

After the supper was over, Jesus walked from Jerusalem through the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jerusalem is on one side of the valley and the Garden of Gethsemane is on the other. During my trip to the Holy Land I visited the Garden of Gethsemane. There are olive trees in the garden today that are old enough to have been growing there when Jesus prayed in the Garden. My prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane was a spiritual highlight for me.

However, it was not a spiritual highlight for the disciples. They failed miserably at supporting their leader. He asked them to pray while he was praying and they fell asleep. Jesus, on the night he was arrested, got little, if any, support from his disciples. Of course, they probably didn't think this night would be any different from any other night where Jesus went off to pray and they fell asleep. I'm sure they thought, 'Here goes Jesus again, praying when he should be in bed asleep! We've heard this before. Let's just take a nap.'

But that night was different. The disciples may have thought life was progressing as it normally did – but Jesus knew he was about to die. And the disciples couldn't understand that fact even when he told them directly.

How often do we refuse to hear the obvious because we can't accept it? When the doctor tells you that the cancer is inoperable, what would you do? When you know your child or grandchild is using drugs, what would you do? When you know your spouse is cheating on you, what would you do?

Like the disciples, you don't want to hear the bad news - and tend to ignore it because you have a different storyline in your mind. Yes, like the disciples, we are listening to another story. The disciples were sure Jesus would be a conquering hero, throw out the Roman rulers and rule Israel like the glorious King David. Did that happen? No, their storyline was not followed. The storyline followed was God's storyline.

Sometimes we like our storyline better than God's. Well, to be truthful, we probably like our storyline better all the time! We're selfish. We want to hold on to what we want, not what God wants for us. We don't always look for God's hand in our lives and what God wants for each of us.

Jesus prayed in the Garden, **“Papa, Father, you can—can't you?—get me out of this. Take this cup away from me. But please, not what I want—what do you want?”**

Can you or I say that we want to do what God wants? I know for me it's not easy, but I do keep trying to do what God wants and to always be listening for an answer to the question Jesus asked God, **“what do you want?”**

Jesus knew that he could avoid death, but if God wanted him to die, then he was going to do it. And he did. Jesus died to fulfill God's plan for our salvation so that you and I can be saved. So that we will not be judged for not keeping the law, so that through Christ's death we can know for certain our sins are forgiven. So that we may live with Jesus forever.

Jesus died. That's God's story. Painful as it is, let's listen to way the story played out on that Friday as we walk in Jesus' footsteps during the final week.