

Big Moments Be Holy

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a six-week series

March 28, 2021

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2 Kings 9:11–13 (NRSV)

[After being anointed with oil by the wandering prophet Elisha, Jehu returns to his tent to tell his fellow officers of his strange encounter.]

¹¹ When Jehu came back to his master's officers, they said to him, "Is everything all right? Why did that madman come to you?" He answered them, "You know the sort and how they babble." ¹² They said, "Liar! Come on, tell us!" So he said, "This is just what he said to me: 'Thus says the LORD, I anoint you king over Israel.' " ¹³ Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."

Zechariah 9:9 (NRSV)

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.

Luke 19:29–40 (NRSV)

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here." ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Few moments are bigger than Palm Sunday!

This week we wrap up this series, *Every Moment Holy*. And if we are going to strive to make our meals holy, our families holy, our routines holy, and our thoughts holy, then we are surely going to strive to make the Big Moments holy. This might be tougher than it seems, for the Big Moments can take over. The excitement and busyness can easily overwhelm our awareness of God's presence. Just think of Christmas and you'll get my point. So, on this Palm Sunday, we will strive to be aware at every turn that we are celebrating God's gift of a Messiah, the true king who would usher in God's rule and usher out the age of sin and death.

The crowds are gathered outside the city walls of Jerusalem, at the eastern gate. They are ready and they are pumped! The day has come. At long last, when it seemed that God would never hear their cries, God has sent his Messiah, his Anointed One. This king from the house of David would inaugurate a true God-ruled kingdom and set about to put the

world right. At long last, the Jews would be free of their hated Roman oppressors. At long last, the temple would be cleansed of all the money-grubbing, ambitious pagan influences. At long last God's king was arriving, ready to be welcomed into the city as a king should be welcomed. Hosanna¹, indeed!

As for Jesus, he purposely wraps all these messianic symbols around himself: the colt, the ride through the city gates, the palm branches, the cloaks laid out in front of him, the shouted Hosannas. All of it. And for the first time, Jesus refers to himself as "Lord". The waiting is over; the time has come.

I bet you like a good party as much as I do. Who doesn't? And that Sunday in Jerusalem was supposed to be the beginning of the biggest and best party ever -- as big a moment as they come. A celebration of salvation. A freedom party. The arrival of the most amazing gift of all -- God's rescue of Israel from the oppressors and the pagans.

You see, it was Passover Week. Every spring, Jews from all over converged on Jerusalem for this festival. It had been instituted by the LORD God Almighty more than a thousand years before. Ever since, God's people had remembered and participated in the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt as they gathered in homes on a spring evening each year.

And this year promised to be the Passover to top all Passovers, for God was about to do his big thing. The time had come. The day had arrived for the keeping of all the promises God had made through his prophets. And it was start with one man from Galilee.

It seemed almost impossible to believe, there had been so many disappointments. But the momentum had been building. Crowds had escorted this man, Jesus was his name, through Jericho, not far from Jerusalem. There, Jesus had brought salvation even to a hated tax collector named Zaccheus. It seemed that everyone, really everyone, was invited to participate in this party.

Longing for a King . . . and a liberator

A thousand years before Jesus, David was king of Israel. David, slayer of Goliath (1 Sam 17). David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14). David, Israel's greatest king, to whom God had promised that he would establish the throne of David's kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:13). *But . . .* four hundred years after David's death, Jerusalem burned. The Temple built by David's son, Solomon, lay in ruins. The Ark of the Covenant was gone. Tens of thousands of God's people were in exile, including their king, who was blinded by the Babylonians after being forced to watch the execution of his sons.

And for the next six hundred years, there was no king in Israel. Sure, there were pretenders, like the various Herods, who were "kings" only at the pleasure of conquerors. But the people of God knew that they had no true king, no king from the House of David. For centuries, they had traded one oppressor for another. For centuries, the Jews had cherished the stories and promises of the king to come. This true king to come, long promised by the prophets, would be the one anointed by God, the *mashia* in Hebrew, the *christos* in Greek, the Messiah and Christ in English. This true king would be the one through whom God would usher in his kingdom, at which time all the world would see that the Jews' confidence in their God had not been misplaced.

By the time of Jesus, the expectations and hopes that God's king would come were so powerful that many Jews tried to hurry things along. Believing that rebellion against the Romans would bring about God's kingdom, more than a few Jews put themselves forward as the long-awaited *mashia*, gathering around themselves bands of followers. Of course, all these would-be messiahs collided with the Romans, who had no tolerance for anyone who might challenge the authority of Caesar. And all these messianic pretenders were eventually executed by the Romans.

¹ "Hosanna" means "Save us!"

And now Jesus had arrived at Jerusalem and was preparing to wrap himself in all the messianic symbols available. No one was to misunderstand the meaning of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. . . . but what *did* it really mean?

The arrival

My family and I were blessed once to see a Broadway revival of Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*. The musical is set in the Iowa town of River City around the turn of the twentieth century. In one scene, the whole town turns out to await the arrival of the Wells Fargo wagon, the weekly UPS truck of the day. No telling what treasures were on that wagon. What dreams would be fulfilled when the wagon stopped and unloaded its cargo?

The Jews of Jesus' day were waiting for a Wells Fargo wagon. And what would be on that wagon when it arrived? It would carry a Messiah, who would in all power and might and wonder and glory throw out the pagan oppressors and cleanse the temple, restoring it to a proper dwelling place of God. The wagon would carry all the nations of the world who would stream to Jerusalem to acknowledge and worship the LORD God. The wagon would carry all those who had died and would now be resurrected, re-embodied to new life. Sons would embrace their long-dead grandmothers and mothers would meet their children who had died during birth. There would be no more tears, except of joy. There would be no death and no mourning, no wars and violence, no hatred or arrogance, no privilege nor division. All would live in peace, enjoying a renewed and restored land, worshiping without end the one who had made them and who was now making all things new.

That was the wagon the crowds thought they were welcoming on that Sunday in Jerusalem. The work was over; the party was just about to get rolling.

Of course, five days later, all those expectations had been dashed against a rock called Golgotha. Most turned away, hoping to pick the right wagon another time. Even after the Sunday morning of the empty tomb, only a few believed that they had welcomed God's wagon after all.

But those few, Jesus' disciples, had met the risen Jesus. He had given them work to do. To be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. To make disciples. To baptize people into a newly born community that would not simply wait for God to finish his work, but to accomplish work of their own. They were to build for the kingdom of God. They were to live out the reality of their claim that, in Christ, they had been reborn. It was as if they were to found and then grow colonies of a new human race, a chosen people, a holy nation.

The shape of these Spirit-of-Christ-empowered new colonies was clear. They were to pray together, to learn together, to worship together, to share the Lord's meal together. They were to feed and clothe, to ensure that not a single person among them was in need of the basics. They were to be aware of God's presence with them in every moment. As best they could, they were to enact heaven-on-earth in all that they did – this was how they were to do life together.

You and I may be living 2,000 years later, but the mission is unchanged. We are to be disciple-making witness to the living Lord. We too are to feed and clothe, to love our neighbor, recognizing that our neighbors include those we dislike or even hate or are even our sworn enemies. Jesus came for all and his kingdom is for all who will respond to his invitation.

In Christ, we experience the fullness of God's eternity – here and now. This is one way we "out live" our lives. But in another sense, we out live our lives by living outwardly, embracing the world around us and all those who share it with us. Palm Sunday is not an ending at all, but always and ever, a vibrant new beginning. A holy beginning.

Distinctive Features of Luke's Palm Sunday Story

In his commentary in the *Interpretation* series, Fred Craddock reviews several distinctive features of Luke's story. Notice what is present and what is missing in Luke's account of that day.

Several features in Luke's account of this event call for close attention. First, notice that the entry involves Jesus and his disciples. Disciples secure the colt, disciples place Jesus on the colt, disciples called him the King who comes in the name of the Lord (Luke only echoes Zech. 9:9; Matthew and John both quote the prophecy). There is no ovation by the general crowds that are in the city for the festival (Matt. 21:9) or by those who had gathered because of reports about the raising of Lazarus (John 12:12); Jesus is honored and praised by his followers. This is not the group which turns cold and later calls for Jesus' crucifixion. His disciples did not fully understand his messiahship, to be sure, but neither are they persons who sing praise and scream death the same week. The portrait of such a fickle crowd must come from some account other than Luke's. The story as Luke tells it is less crowded and more subdued, but it is an event of and for believers, and its meaning lies in Jesus and in their faith in him, meaning that is in no way related to public favor or disfavor, participation or nonparticipation. This is not to say Jesus' followers have come to clarity and maturity; the events soon to transpire will test them, and some will fail. But at this moment, descending the Mount of Olives, they are right.

Second, Luke's account contains no mention of hosannas, of palms, or of branches cut from trees. Those belonged to parades and festivals with nationalistic overtones, and Luke apparently wants this event to carry no such implication. Perhaps this is also the reason the bursts of praise contain no references to David or to the Davidic throne. The word "King" is used (v. 38), but it seems to be without political force. In fact, the expressions of praise to the King join Ps. 118:26 and the words of the heavenly host at the birth of Jesus (2:14). "King" is placed beside "Peace"; there is nothing here to support the charge against him before Pilate (23:2).

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

A study of the book of Exodus

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

A study of James

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like, wear your pj's.-- we're on-line now so who'd even know. Have a Bible handy.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, "Scott Engle".

Scott's Sunday Class

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Current series: *God's Words: The Vocabulary of Faith*

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.