

**Matthew 21:1-11 N.T. 21 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup>“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” <sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Matthew 21:1b-11 N.T. Page 21**  
***“Misperceived Hope”***

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. O God, on this First Sunday of April, we come to you in desperate need of hope. Remind us today that you are our true hope and our real salvation. In Jesus’ precious Name we pray, **Amen.**

**Introduction: Everyone loves a parade.** People marching. Bands playing. Floats floating. Crowds lining the route pressing against each other eager to see the passing sights. **There’s** the Massey’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. **The annual** Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena, California. And right here in Erie parades like the **St. Patrick’s Day Parade** and our own Gannon University’s **Homecoming Parade** among many others. Parades are public celebrations of all of the things that make life possible and that give us bright hope for tomorrow.

**Today is the day** in the Christian year when we remember another parade. This parade wasn’t elaborate and highly choreographed, **and it didn’t even have** one marching band or a single firetruck. It was a far simpler and more spontaneous parade. **People were already gathered** in Jerusalem for the annual Jewish Feast of the Passover when **someone spotted a young man** riding into town on a lowly beast of burden. Hardly what you would think would be the makings of a parade. But that person recognized this young man as the fellow who had been traveling throughout the Judean countryside healing the sick and teaching people about the kingdom of God. I imagine at first it might have just been that **one person and their friends** who began shouting. But their cries attracted the attention of others who in turn attracted yet others until **a large crowd** lined the path shouting to this young man riding on a donkey. **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”** (Matthew 21:9b, NRSV). Yes, everyone loves a parade.

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**On that first Palm Sunday no one understood what was about to come.** Spring was springing. **Preparations were under** way for the annual Passover feast. Everyone was anticipating gathering with family and friends. And now that the **Messiah was riding into Jerusalem**, there was hope that Israel would soon be restored to its former national glory and that the long Roman occupation might finally be coming to an end. **Sin was** the furthest thing from anyone's mind. **They were thinking** of their own wellbeing. They were thinking of their own national sense of pride. They were thinking of a coming leader who was going to turn things around. **But their perception was too small.** Their perception was too self-centered. They were concerned for themselves and their families and their country. They were hopeful, but their hope was a "*Misperceived Hope.*"

**Our Bible Lesson** tells us as Jesus rode into Jerusalem there was quite a stir. Those from the crowd who hadn't seen or heard of Jesus, and that was probably the vast majority, all began asking the same question? "**Who is this?**" (Matthew 10b, NRSV). They could see Jesus riding on the donkey, and they could hear the people crying "Hosanna" (Matthew 21:9, NRSV) but they weren't sure why? That's when those in the know among the crowd began to cry out, "**This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee**" (Matthew 21:11b, NRSV). That is true. Jesus was a prophet. Jesus had indeed grown up in Nazareth in Galilee. But if that's all there was to this Jesus, we wouldn't be remembering that simple spontaneous parade some two-thousand-years later. No one knew what was about to happen in the coming week. **No one knew about** Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday, or Black Saturday. No one knew that Resurrection Day was just a week away, let alone how profoundly that was going to change everything. No one knew that is, but Jesus.

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**I've told you before** that while I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home and was raised in the church, the churches I grew up in were non-liturgical churches. That means they **didn't strictly follow the Christian year**. Now this might be hard for you to believe but **I can't ever remember** receiving a palm branch to wave in church on Palm Sunday morning. Sure, we had read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but we never called the Sunday before Easter "Palm Sunday." And we didn't call the week between Palm Sunday and Easter, Holy Week, and we **didn't have any special church services** on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. In fact, I had never even heard those days called that until I met Donna and began worshiping with her in her United Methodist Church. I did grow up Christian, but I did not grow up with liturgical Christian traditions.

**Last Sunday** we were still holding out hope that we might yet be able to hold face-to-face worship this coming Sunday on Easter. Even the non-liturgical church's I grew up in celebrated Easter. We did have Easter lilies and came to church dressed in our new Easter outfits. **But this coming Sunday** for the first time in all of our lives, we won't be gathering for face-to-face worship. I know it's disappointing. I know it's unsettling. But we're blessed because God has provided us a means to worship anyway.

**Last summer** when Tom Balos, Susan Bartlett and I began designing and installing a live-streaming system here in Oxford Center we never dreamed this would be our sole means of gathering in worship this coming Easter. We hoped live streaming would allow us to connect with those who couldn't be physically present. **Our perception** was a misperception. It wasn't that it was wrong. **It just wasn't a God size perception**. The perception of the crowd wasn't wrong either, but it too wasn't a God sized perception. **Yes, on that first Palm Sunday no one perceived what was about to come.**

**End I.**

## Move II.

**But God was about to fix humanity's biggest problem.** I mentioned it just a bit ago. I said it was something no one was thinking much about back on the first Palm Sunday. **I said no one was thinking much about sin.** Sin, it's just a tiny little word, but it been humanity's biggest problem since people first began roaming the earth. Holy Week is about God's fix for sin.

**Turning to our** trusty *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, second edition, let's me read you the definition of the word sin. *"Theologically sin is **the human condition** of separation from God that arises from opposition to God's purposes. It may be breaking God's law, failing to do what God will, or rebellion. It needs forgiveness by God."* **If I were to ask** the typical person on the street what it means to sin, they would say that to sin is, **"Doing bad things."** **Lying** is a sin. **Cheating** is a sin. **Stealing** is a sin. **Murdering** someone is a sin. That's all true enough. Each of those actions are violations of God laws. But that's viewing sin only on moral terms. Yes, sin is about not doing what is wrong. **But it's it also a sin to know what is right and not do it.** But as I remind you each time when we **partake of communion** together, we all need to **"earnestly repent of our sin."** I then proceed to define sin not from solely moral terms, but to state it in relational terms. I will say that each of us needs to turn away from **anything that is separating us from God** and turn back toward God in humility and love. But try as we might, we just keep messing up. **Like the Apostle Paul** we find that **"We can will what is right, but we cannot do it. For we do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do"** (Romans 7:18b-19, NRSV). **Enter Holy week**, God looks at we who are unholy and prone to sin and takes our place and atones for our sins. **"The wages of all of our sins is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 6:23, NRSV). We're holy because Jesus is holy. We're alive because Jesus is alive.

**Matthew's account** of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem provides a detail that has baffled people for years that's not found in the accounts in the other Gospels. Let me read you Jesus' instruction to his disciples again from **Matthew 21:2 (NRSV) again**. **“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.”**

The other Gospels all speak of fetching a donkey for Jesus to ride, but only Matthew says they fetched both a donkey and the donkey's colt. Why? Because Matthew is very concerned about showing that Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. **Let me read you Zechariah 9:9 (NRSV)**. **“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.”** Ok, is it one donkey or two? Well if you want to take what is said perfectly literally you might conclude it's two, **a mother and a child**. Or if you see it more poetically, it just be one because after all, all donkeys were colts once, they were folds of a donkey.

This detail has led to lots of speculation. **I read one commentator** who thought maybe Jesus road the **mother donkey** along the hilly rugged pathway leading to Jerusalem and then **switched to the colt** as he approached the city and the pathway got smoother. People have even **drawn pictures like this**. Who cares if it was one donkey or two; it was a donkey! **Rather than riding** in on a powerful war horse—a mighty white stallion—as one might expect, **he was recognized** because he came riding in on a lowly donkey—as Zachariah had said.

Yes, they recognized Jesus as being the Messiah because of the donkey, but they totally missed why he'd come. **They thought he'd come to triumph over the Roman occupation, but Jesus had really come to triumph over sin and death.**

Yes, people's perceptions were off. **But God really was about to fix humanity's biggest problem.**

**End II.**

**Move III.**

**So, let's set our hope on what's above.** Because of Jesus, we're all part of God's eternal family. **We're Jesus' brothers and sisters. We're God's sons and daughters. We're still in** the world, but we're no longer of this world.

**On Monday** we all learned that we will be on a "Stay-at-Home-Order" at least through the end of April. In face of this ever-present threat we all must do our best to follow the directives of those given authority over us. But as I have said before, it's become increasingly difficult to keep up with what **county, state, and federal authorities** are directing which at times are at odds with each other. It's not because they want to be at odds, it's just because the situation is very fluid and even the experts have differing opinions on what we should and should do.

**For example**, earlier this week Dr. Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said the general public shouldn't wear face mask so we wouldn't deprive **people working** on the front-lines of healthcare from having the masks they truly need. **But then on** Friday Dr. Fauci changed course and recommended that the general public **should wear masks**, but they should be cloth mask we fashion ourselves. Shortly thereafter, **Governor Tom Wolf** officially passed on the same directive. **Here's a cloth mask** our own Katharine Hoffman made that uses an air conditioner filter as a liner. This just goes to show that when a need arises, human ingenuity works to meet that need. (Sorry to my progressive friends for slipping a free-market principle in there.)

**But none of this changes** the fear that lurks in the back of everyone's minds as we see the statistics shoot upward. So much of what we do **requires sound judgment**. Should we go to the store or should we stay home? Should we venture out to be of help or should we stay home to be safe. It's one thing to risk getting infected yourself but it's something else altogether to risk infecting someone else, especially someone at higher risk. **No wonder** anxiety levels are high.

**We're a people of faith.** We're a people of faith in **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God, **who did not think equality** with God to be something to be grasps, but who humbled himself even to death on a cross, to redeem a people for God. That's not just some other worldly hope. **That's our strength for today** and our bright hope for tomorrow. I've quoted **Romans 14:8** (NRSV) a lot lately, **"If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."** That's not fatalistic, that's hopeful. That's hope that allows us to **carry on the with the life sustain ministry** of our church even when faced with personal risk. We won't be stupid. We don't have a death wish. And certainly, none of us wants to unwittingly infect anyone. **But we will not shy away** for helping those in need just to minimize our personal risk.

**Friday morning**, I saw that one of our local artists had just posted a new video called *"The Real Virus."* It's a freestyle rap by Charles Brown, known professionally as **CEE Brown**. I'm pretty sure some of you know him. **I first became aware of Charles** about three years ago when he did the "voice over" for the Jefferson Education Society's video *"This is Our Erie"* after Erie had taken a beating in the national media. I Facebook friended Charles back then to thank him for his role in that video. Friday morning when I saw his latest freestyle, I messaged Charles and asked if he'd give us permission to use his video as part of today's message. Charles agreed. So, here's *"The Real Virus"* freestyle by CEE Brown shot by *Xhibit One Productions*.

{**Play Video: "The Real Virus HD.mp4" [1:29]**}

Like Charles I too "was raised in a church, I wasn't raised to be scared. When there's a problem on this earth, I'm already prepared." That's hope especially even when hope seems distant. **Yes, in life and in death**—in God we trust. **So, let's truly set our hope on what's above.**

**End III.**

**Conclusion:** The parade on that first Palm Sunday wasn't elaborate or highly choreographed and it didn't have a single marching band or firetruck, but it did attract a crowd. *"Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord."* Yes, everyone loves a parade. **Yet, on that first Palm Sunday no one perceived what was about to come.** No one knew about Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday, or Black Saturday. Sin was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. **But God really was about to fix humanity's biggest problem.** People's misperception was that the Messiah had come to triumph over the Roman occupation, but the Messiah had really come to triumph over sin and death. **So, let's truly set our hope on what's above.** When hope seems distant, remember all hope that's any hope comes from God. Set aside *"Misperceived Hope,"* and perceive the only hope that's any hope with Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Closing Prayer:** Let's pray. O God, when nature conspires to distort our perception, instill within us Your hope that surpasses all human comprehension. **Amen!**

**Sending Forth:** Is your sense of hope fading? Are you scared? Then look to God above to clear up your misperceptions. Go forth with strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow through Jesus Christ our Lord. **And all of God's people said...Amen!**