

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. There are so many exciting services and devotionals coming up this week. We start with today talking about Jesus entering Jerusalem. On Thursday we will have a Maundy Thursday service that evening discussing the Last Supper. And Friday we will be performing a Good Friday cantata with St. John's, which interestingly enough all of the readers will be either active or retired clergy.

As much as I am excited for Holy Week and Easter, I'm also a little saddened by the end of the Lenten season. I've enjoyed our Lenten suppers immensely, but I've really enjoyed our Lenten Lunches. I think the lunches really identified a part of our community that has been lost in the post-Covid world. Simply put, we've been missing the community.

We all know what the world has become since Covid. We already know how we've isolated ourselves off from different groups. We've separated ourselves into sheep and goats without realizing it. This was an opportunity for all of that to change.

I spent a lot of time reaching out to the different ministers on the Madrid Ministerial Council before we reformed the organization. And the discussions went everywhere. Some were incredibly enthusiastic about the council reforming and getting the Lenten Lunches back together. Others were concerned about inviting everyone and just keeping the group small. But, that is the best part of a group like that, we all have our own ideas and opinions.

That really isn't any different than the rest of the world. Not everyone agrees with everyone else. If they did, we wouldn't be on our 130 mass shooting already this year. But for a less drastic example, we wouldn't be able to have friendly debates about which sports team is better than the rest. We all see things from a different perspective and what seems important to one might not be as important to another.

We can see this just by looking at the four gospels in the New Testament. Even though they are telling the same story, they don't always say it the same way and focus on the same elements. The stories are being told by four different individuals, with four different backgrounds, to fundamentally four different groups.

In today's reading from Matthew, Matthew points out that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on two donkeys. Whereas the other three gospels only said that he rode on one. Why is there this difference? Does it imply that Matthew is wrong in comparison or is he right and the rest are wrong?

There are a lot of theories behind why Matthew's account is different from everyone else's. The most simplified theory is that Matthew was teaching other Jewish Christians. So, he tried to follow the prophecy from Isaiah and identify Jesus as the Messiah to them. The other scriptures were meant to teach Gentiles that would not have as significant a background with the Torah.

The point isn't that someone is either right or wrong. The point is that we all share the love for Jesus. We all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences, but we share the commonality that we believe in Jesus. Just like those that lined the roadway waving their palm branches.

Jesus had used his authority to get the donkeys. He entered the city with crowds of people rejoicing and saying his name. They all shared the belief that he was the Messiah. He was no longer a rumor in the background. He was real and was approaching the city.

Once he reached the temple, he used his authority again and threw everyone out of the temple. He quoted the scrolls saying that they had taken a house of prayer and made it into a

den of robbers. He continues to fulfill prophecy and support his followers. After everyone had left the temple, he continued to heal the blind and lame.

At this point, he has only made people angry. Instead of celebrating and rejoicing that the Son of God was there, instead of celebrating the work he was doing healing the blind and lame, they were angry. They couldn't see past their own hubris, their own greed for wealth and power. They were embarrassed.

But, haven't we all been there at some point in our lives. Haven't we gotten in our own way and not seen what is before us? Of course we have, because we are only human. But the thing that is supposed to bring us back is our love for Jesus. The gift of the spirit filling out souls with love and wisdom if only we are willing to hear it.

I guess we can call this message part one today. We should rejoice in the grace of Jesus and his love. We should listen to the children and wave our palm branches in his honor, showing the world that we are proud to be called christians. We should dismiss those who try to quiet us and let God's love pour out from us.

**Blessed is the king who comes in the name of Lord!
Gracious God, as we stand at the gates of the city,
give us grace to recognize the king we proclaim,
and courage to be a part of your kingdom—
even when it goes against our ways and the ways of the world,
even when it leads us where we do not want to go.
Empower us to free ourselves from the tempting alternatives
of power and wealth and status,
and embolden us to live lives of thanksgiving and praise.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!**