



# First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

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April 9, 2017 | Palm Sunday

**SERMON:** The Servant's Entrance

**Question:** "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 20:20-28

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

**Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV)**

**Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Used with children)**

*21 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> <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<sup>9</sup> 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."*

**Sermon:** The Servant's Entrance

**Question:** "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

**Scripture:** Matthew 20:20-28

*<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"<sup>23</sup> They said to him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."*

*24 When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

If I read this passage correctly, the mother of James and John is trying to get some special treatment for her two grown sons. If you have ever watched Marie on "Everybody Loves Raymond," you know the mother of James and John. "They are such good boys!" she thinks, as she approaches Jesus. She wants to make sure her precious babies are not forgotten when King Jesus takes the throne. Surely, they deserve places of honor.

Perhaps she missed the memo. Jesus sent it three times. Yes, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, but not to restore Israel to its glory days and sit on David's throne. According to Jesus he is going to be "handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."

Jesus turns to James and John and asks them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" If you look up this expression you learn that drinking a cup indicates suffering and punishment. It also means salvation.<sup>1</sup> In essence Jesus is asking them if they are willing to face the risks associated with confronting the powers that oppress, enslave, intimidate, and kill. Because that is what Jesus is entering the city to do. It is a calculated plan to distinguish God's kingdom from Rome's kingdom. Jesus intends to make a scene. So, he asks, "Are you in? Are you able to drink the cup?" "Yes!" they exclaim, "We are able to drink the cup."

They are like soldiers ready and willing to go to battle. Their mother is beaming with pride. For a moment, it seems that Jesus is going to reward them for their answer. She is deflated, however, when Jesus tells them that they will drink the cup, but granting places of privilege and honor is not what Jesus about.

We have been on a Lenten journey with the disciples and the question that looms over it all is are we willing to see this through to the end? Are we willing to drink the cup, take up our cross, deny ourselves, give our lives? Are we?

It is no coincidence that the story that sits between this encounter with the mother of James and John and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a story about healing two men of their blindness. They cry out, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" while the crowd tells them to shut up. Jesus asks them what they want and they say, "Lord, let our eyes be opened."

While there is a part of us that wants to shout, "We are ready, willing and able, Jesus!" We might be better off crying out, "Lord have mercy on us! We don't know what we are talking about half the time. We want to see! We want to see what you are trying to teach us!"

The story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem is further proof that Jesus is not your typical king. He is not a tyrant. He is not the kind of king that rules with an iron fist and a legion of soldiers. God's kingdom is not one in which a small number of people lord their power over others to dominate and oppress. Jesus rides into Jerusalem like a returning king – but not the king that James and John's mother wants – not the king most people are hoping for.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Interpreter's Study Bible

Jesus' anti-triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on the first day of the Jewish festival of Passover – a Jewish festival celebrating the Hebrews liberation from slavery from Pharaoh. It was a major festival and pilgrims from throughout the land traveled to Jerusalem for the festival. You can imagine Rome's concern about the potential for problems. If you get all those Jews together, celebrating something like freedom from slavery, it could potentially launch another revolt or uprising.

The Romans had a way to make sure nothing happened. For major festivals, especially Passover, Pilate, the governor, pulled himself away from his beachfront palace in Caesarea to head over to Jerusalem in a royal fashion. This imperial parade was well known among Jews in the first century.

Pilate entered Jerusalem from the west in royal procession. It was the kind of parade that got your attention. Cavalry on horses, armor-clad foot soldiers with helmets armed to the hilt, golden eagles on poles, colorful banners, and Pilate – all making a grand entrance into Jerusalem. It was big – it was flashy – and intentionally planned to intimidate anyone who dared to stir up trouble.

Entering Jerusalem from the east, Jesus rode a donkey, with a colt. Many laid their cloaks on the road and others spread out leafy branches. No banners, no weapons, just shouts of "Hosanna" from folks walking in front and following behind.

There were two parades that Sunday; one from the west where the dying sun sets, one from the east where a new day begins - Pilate – surrounded by legions of soldiers bearing arms - Jesus – surrounded by peasants bearing leafy branches, riding a nursing mother. There were two parades – with two kingdoms colliding; the kingdom of Caesar and every tyrant ruler like him and the kingdom of God.

Jesus' parade was intentionally staged. People in the city started to ask, "Who is this?" Matthew uses the word "crowds" to designate the ones who were with Jesus. The crowds reply back, "This is Jesus of Nazareth."

Matthew didn't write about this other parade because he didn't have to. His original audience already knew about it. They could see, perhaps more clearly than we, how Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed stood in stark contrast to everything they knew about kingdoms and rulers.

If Palm Sunday is confusing to you, don't worry you are not alone. It was confusing for the crowds that followed Jesus. It was confusing for the disciples.

I love how Sara Miles, priest and author, tells the story of Holy Week. She writes: "Think about it. During Holy Week, we wave palms in the air and hail Jesus as king, the long-awaited messiah who's going to save us from our oppressors, then we change our minds and scream that the oppressors should crucify him; we share a loving last supper with Jesus and he washes our feet, then we sneak out after dinner and betray him. Jesus begs us to stay with him, we promise we will, then we don't. We abandon him, he's arrested and beaten; he forgives us, then we run away. Then Jesus is killed; we lay him in the tomb and weep; we go back for him, then he's gone, then he's back, and then — wait! — he's not dead at all."<sup>2</sup> She concludes, "No wonder the world prefers bunnies."

Jesus asks, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

You might be familiar with an old hymn called, "Are Ye Able." It was written by

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20140407JJ.shtml>

Earl Marlatt, in 1926, and inspired by our scripture reading for today. It is a song that challenges us to say "yes" to the humble king who enters on the back of a donkey. It is a song that strengthens our resolve to be courageous and to hold fast to what Jesus taught in the face of overwhelming circumstances. It is a song that provokes us out of complacency and feel good religion. It is a song that calls us to discipleship – to do something – to stand up to powers that oppress and exploit and abuse and destroy. It is a song for sturdy dreamers who believe God has not given up on us and creation.

*Congregation singing the refrain – pastor leading verses)*

Are ye able, said the Master,  
To be crucified with Me?  
Yea, the sturdy dreamers answered,  
To the death we follow Thee.

*Refrain*

*Lord, we are able. Our spirits are Thine.  
Remold them, make us, like Thee, divine.  
Thy guiding radiance above us shall be  
A beacon to God, to love and loyalty.*

Are you able to relinquish  
Purple dreams of power and fame,  
To go down into the Garden,  
Or to die a death of shame?

Refrain

Are ye able, when the anguish  
Racks your mind and heart with pain,  
To forgive the souls who wrong you,  
Who would make your striving vain?

Refrain

Are ye able to remember,  
When a thief lifts up his eyes,  
That his pardoned soul is worthy  
Of a place in paradise?

Refrain

Are ye able? Still the Master  
Whispers down eternity,  
And heroic spirits answer,  
Now as then in Galilee.

Refrain

Amen.