

Joe Hill
The Real King
Matthew 21:1-11

Now it's great to be here and sharing with you at the beginning of this week that we call Holy Week. Holy Week is the last week of Jesus's life, that begins on Palm Sunday and goes through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday through Easter Sunday. And today we begin the journey of walking alongside Jesus through scripture through Holy Week. Today we reflect on Jesus's final entrance into Jerusalem and begin the journey with Jesus and His disciples into Jerusalem towards the cross and ultimately towards the Empty Tomb. This Palm Sunday I want us to seriously consider one question. Is the real Jesus really the King of your life?

As Jesus entered into the city of Jerusalem, He was welcomed like a king. How quickly that tune would change. What happened? The crowd on that day had a very particular set of expectations and a picture of what and who Jesus should be, as king and as Messiah. Now the idea of the King of Israel, the King of the Jews is rooted deeply in the Old Testament scripture. God had made a binding promise called a Covenant with King David that one day someone would sit on King David's throne and would reign over a united and free Kingdom of Israel, the people of God. However at the time of Jesus, the Jews lived in anticipation of who this might possibly be since they were currently living under the oppressive yoke of Roman rule. There was a harsh king over them and they lived under the ever-present burden of being subject and subjugated to a foreign power. So long as the Jews played nice and didn't make too much fuss, Rome would tolerate them. But the pride and the dignity of the people of God has been stripped away.

Yet still in this place, they clung in faith to that promise, to that Covenant that God had made to establish a king who would sit on King David's throne one day. This King would lead them into freedom and autonomy as the unburdened and free people of God. And on that Palm

Sunday, the people believed that they had found their King, the King that they have been waiting for. And so they shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David” which means “save us, Son of David” and King Jesus certainly was riding in to Jerusalem to save, but not like the king that they would have expected, with an entourage and fanfare, riding on a mighty steed surrounded by armed guards as he strode triumphantly into the city, amidst the shouts of praises of the people. No, He was a humble King riding in on a donkey, surrounded by his unassuming disciples, a group of normal people. This is not a typical King. He was going to assume his place on the throne, but not by force, not by violent revolution, but by way of the cross and an empty tomb.

The contrast in this scene is striking. The frenzied crowd, pregnant with expectation for a mighty leader who would deliver them from the oppressive rule of Rome and assume his rightful place on the throne of David, laying their coats down in front of Him, and cutting branches from the palm trees, lying them on the ground, chanting out to Jesus “Save us, Son of David,” But they really had no idea the extent to which Jesus really would go to save them and to save us.

Here's where I think that matters for us today. You know it's easy for us, for you and I, to get used to and comfortable with the wrong picture of Jesus, the wrong expectations of Jesus. We formulate in our minds a picture of Jesus that works for us, that meets our expectations, that delivers for us the things that we want and hope for. On Palm Sunday, the people of Jerusalem were buzzing, whipped up into a frenzy, about the coming of a new king, but the problem was that this was a king that had been fashioned in their own image.

Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is so easy for us to form Jesus Christ in our own image. Isn't it? And then we worship him for that. But let's be honest. When we do, we're really just worshipping ourselves. It's easy to conform Jesus to our hopes, our dreams, and our

expectations rather than follow the true King Jesus from his triumphal entry on that day in glory, to that day on the cross, and through the empty tomb.

I'm going to get a little personal here. Every year during Holy Week, I revisit the story of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, his last supper, his arrest, his trial, torture, his execution, his burial, ultimately to his resurrection. You know that a third of the Gospel of Matthew is devoted to just this one week of Jesus's life? It must carry some sort of weight then. Every time I read this story, there's a little part of me that envisions a different outcome. He's been questioned by Pontius Pilate, "Are you the King of the Jews?" and He, in a display of glory and power, proves himself miraculously right there in front of everyone. He avoids the torture. He avoids the shame, the humiliation. He avoids the cross. He is justified and proves everyone wrong right there. God shines a beam of glorious light from the heavens and says, "This is my son" and everyone worships Him. There is no torture. There is no suffering, no violence, and no death. I like to imagine that that's how the story would go, but it never does. He doesn't do any of that. There is no display of power or glory as the world would see it because that is not the way of our King. He is King through suffering. He is Lord through sacrifice. He is glorified in His humility and He takes His throne by way of the cross. He is King Jesus, Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Now for those of us who believe, we have to wrestle with the reality that often our understanding of the Jesus of scripture, in the values that we have as Americans, as people who live in the Bay Area, as working professionals, as people from a particular socioeconomic status or class, as people of particular political persuasions. We tend to mix in our values with the character and person of Jesus in Scripture and come up with a combination of both. Have you ever noticed how easy it is for Jesus to care about the same things that you? To love the same kinds of people that you love? To judge the same kinds of people that you judge? And to

condone the way that we already live? Let me tell you. If there is no friction in between the way that your life is today and the call that Jesus Christ Our King has on it, then one of two things has happened. The first one is that you are already perfect. I know that's not me. But if it's not that, then it is most likely that you have a picture of Jesus that has conformed a bit too much to your likeness.

It was so easy for those people 2,000 years ago to spread out their coats and palm branches and shout "Hosanna" to a King and to a God who was made in their own image. And so it is with us today. And here's the good news for us today. If we have a King Jesus that is formed to our likeness, then we are expecting far too little from our King.

So my challenge to you today is this. Ask God to reveal His heart, His character, His son to you. Seek Him out in Scripture. What does the Bible tell you about your King? When your King says forgive your enemies, are you tempted to think, "yeah I know, but not to them." When He says love your neighbor as yourself, are you tempted to think, "yeah but You don't know my neighbor." When He says you can't serve both God and money, what do you do? How about this? When King Jesus says that your sins are forgiven, do you believe Him? Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we have a King who is faithful and He always makes good on His promises.

Perhaps there are some watching today who aren't sure if they really believe. Maybe you have doubts and are skeptical. Perhaps you've grown up in or been a part of a church for years and are still wrestling with whether or not you really believe this stuff. Here's my question for you and it's the same question that those people were asking 2,000 years ago as Jesus walked into the city. Who is this Jesus? Who do you think that Jesus is? What do you make of this King? The King who is not proud, but humble. He's not oppressive, but compassionate. He is not harsh, but rather forgiving. Have you really considered what you make of King Jesus? If He is

real and if He is who He says He is, then He is King whether you believe or not. What you do or do not believe about Jesus matters.

And I want to extend a couple invitations to you on this Palm Sunday:

The first would be to read through the story of Holy Week this week. You can do it one chapter a day. Matthew 21, which we read some of today, through 28. You can see Jesus's journey from his entrance into Jerusalem all the way through the empty tomb on Easter Sunday.

The second is this. Over the course of this week, we'll be posting some messages or perhaps some truncated services on Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday and we'll be back again in one week on Easter Sunday with another service. I invite you to walk alongside us as a congregation as we journey with Jesus through Holy Week this year.

Now what I'm asking each of you to do today is to be willing to come face-to-face with the real King Jesus. On Palm Sunday, we see a striking contrast between the people's expectations of their King and the real King Jesus who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, who comes in humility to assume his rightful place on the throne, and not just in some city halfway around the world 2,000 years ago, but in the throne in your life and over all of creation. There is a King over all of creation. All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to Him and He has swung wide open the doors to enter into His kingdom. He is Jesus and He is King, Hosanna to the Son of David.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You don't just conform to our expectation, but God, You transform our expectations by revealing Your true character to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ and Lord, we pray today that You would open the eyes of our

heart to see King Jesus for who He really is, Your Son and our Savior and our King. In whose name, we pray. Amen