and praised God. Seeing this, the Pharisees asked Jesus to stop the people from celebrating, and by implication to reject their accolades. While the people cheered Jesus

as King, the authorities plotted his downfall. By week’s end, Jesus was dead. Where is the triumph in that?

Then, the day after his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus dramatically and publicly “cleansed” the temple. He literally whipped the crowd into a frenzy. These public displays forced the authorities to deal with Jesus. “Go big or go home,” the saying says. Jesus went big. He lit a fuse that exploded later in the week with the bang of the soldiers’ hammers as they drove nails into his hands and feet. Both the entry into the city and the ruckus in the temple defy the Monday mindset: “No, you cannot carry on as usual!” Jesus seems to be shouting. “My kingdom is not of this world, so do not lose it in the mundane of a Monday.”

New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan suggests that as Passover approached, Jesus went to Jerusalem intentionally “to make twin demonstrations, first against Roman imperial control over the City of Peace and, second, against Roman imperial control over the temple.…In other words, against the (sub) governor Pilate and his high-priest Caiaphas.” As Crossan explains it, Jesus planned his very public entry into Jerusalem on the donkey to be a *criticism* of Roman power and a *parody* of it.

Each year at the time of the Passover Festival, people flooded into Jerusalem from all over the Empire. To maintain order and assert Rome’s control, Pilate would travel from his home base in Caesarea, bringing with him a large contingent of troops. Pilate would ride into the city on a powerful warhorse bedecked with colors, banners, insignia, and armor to remind people that Rome was in charge.

By contrast, Jesus arrived on a donkey. All four gospels tell the Palm Monday story, but only Matthew adds the explanation that Jesus chose a donkey to fulfill the words of the prophet Zechariah: “*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*.” Why did he do this? Zechariah explains it was to “*cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations*...” (Zechariah 9:9-10). Contrast Pilate on his war horse with Jesus on a nursing donkey mare with her colt beside her, and you see the intended message: “Peace on earth, yes, but not peace by Rome’s violent victory, rather peace by God’s non-violent justice,” as Crossan says.

Jesus forced the issue again when he created a disturbance in the temple. The temple was the house of God for Jews of all nations, but the temple and its high priest operated under Rome’s control, and Jesus’ action with the whip declared this unacceptable to God. By driving out the sellers and moneychangers from the temple, Jesus “symbolically destroys the temple’s fiscal basis by overturning the tables where monies were changed into the standard donation coinage” of the Empire (Crossan). With these two actions, his entry on a donkey and his cleansing of the temple, Jesus drove home the question of who truly rules our lives: Rome or God? Jesus did this in a very public way, before large crowds of people.

Margaret Minnick writes that Jesus was accustomed to these crowds. Crowds surrounded him whenever he taught, preached, healed, and performed miracles. Having a large crowd of people around Jesus on Palm Sunday was no problem for him; but not everyone in that crowd was there for the right reason. There were five distinct crowds that included people with five different agendas and five different motives.

* The **curious crowd** saw Jesus preach, teach, heal, and perform many miracles over a three-year period. These people had a curious mentality. What would Jesus do next?
* The **confused crowd** is illustrated in Matthew 21:10-11, “*When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked, “Who can this be?*” Even though they were following him, they were still confused about who Jesus was.
* The third group included the **pretenders**. They were in the crowd on Palm Sunday pretending to be committed to Jesus, but they were not fully committed. They would be easily swayed by the Pharisees to condemn Jesu slater in the week.
* The fourth group included the **opposers** like the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There are opposers today who promote their own interests and their own agendas. Opposers try to tear down God’s people just like the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to do to Jesus.
* The **committed crowd** is the last group and the one most people say they are in, but this is the smallest group. They remained fully committed, even when their loyalty was tested by Jesus’ arrest, trial, and execution.

Which group are you in today? What issues does Jesus force us to consider on our Palm Monday? We may not like it. The issues may make us uncomfortable; but when the issues are forced, we are compelled to choose to address them or ignore them. Racism. Poverty. Food insecurity. The housing crisis. The spiraling national debt. Sexual harassment. Unfair pay scales. Immigration. Refugees. Armed conflict in Ukraine. Nuclear escalation with North Korea. The lingering effects of COVID-19. The political divisiveness of our nation. We cannot ignore the issues or the advocates who put themselves in legal jeopardy or risk physical violence to say that something isn’t right, fair, for the common good, or pleasing to God.

When Jesus rides into our lives, whether in a church on a Sunday or on the street on a Monday, he forces us to take issue with the world’s wrongs and make them right. He calls us to choose, to decide, to follow him, to trust him and in doing so to confront injustice, expose danger, and challenge the arrogance that rides over others.

**Palm Sunday Prayer:**

O Lord, you rode on. You rode over the cloaks and under the branches, You rode through the shouts and past the praises, receiving the praise that you deserved, but not confusing our praise in your presence for your purpose in coming.

O Lord, you rode on. You rode towards the controversy and the cost, You rode towards the curses and the cross, receiving the stripes you didn’t deserve, to give us a reward that we couldn’t earn.

O Lord, you rode on. You rode through the tomb and the grave, You rode through our time and space, ascending to a throne that will never decay, a priesthood that will never pass away, a life of love that will always remain, and hearing us even now as we pray.

O Lord, you rode on. We remember the journey you have taken as we commit ourselves to walking in the same way.  Give us the strength, hope, and joy we need as we follow. In your name we pray, Amen.

**Sources:**

* “Chronology of the Holy Week and resurrection appearances in the gospels.” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX Nashville: Abingdon, 1995, 704-705.
* Crossan, John Dominic. “Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem? A Holy Week reflection.” *HuffPost*, March 31, 2012, updated May 31, 2012. Retrieved September 22, 2018.
* Doig, Kenneth Frank. “The triumphal entry on Palm Sunday,” *New Testament Chronology*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, chapter 20. nowoezone.com. Retrieved September 22, 2018.
* Minicks, Margaret, “5 types of people in the Palm Sunday crowd,” LetterPile.com, April 21, 2018. letterpile.com. Retrieved September 27, 2018.
* Parkinson, James & Ernie Kuenzli. “When did Jesus enter Jerusalem?” *The Herald,* heraldmag.org. n.d. (but URL says 2012). Retrieved September 22, 2018.

**Palm Monday**

Sunday, April 14, 2019 [Luke 19:28-40](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+19%3a28-40&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

This is Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. But this event happened over 2,000 years ago. Are we sure it took place on a Sunday? If you look to the Gospels for proof, you will find just a single clue in John 12, which says that six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, to the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, and that “*the next day*” Jesus came into Jerusalem (12:1, 12).

That sounds simple – just back-date Jesus’ entry six days from the start of Passover. But the problem is this: Passover is always on the same date on the Hebrew calendar (a 28-day lunar calendar), meaning that Passover can fall on any day of the week. The critical piece of information would be the year. In what year the crucifixion took place? To say that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday is largely tradition based on two assumptions: that Jesus died in the year A.D. 33 (some scholars say A.D. 30), and the fact that all four gospels agree that the crucifixion took place on Friday of that week (Mt. 27:62; Mk. 15:42; Lk. 23:54; Jn. 19:31).

With that ambiguity in place, it is entirely possible, as some biblical scholars suggest, that the procession into Jerusalem took place on *Monday*. If it was a Monday, it was a weekday, not the Sabbath, which, for Jews, was sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Thus, it was certainly not a “holy day” in the religious sense. Even if it was Sunday, it still was not a holy day, a religious day, like Sunday is for us. For the Jews, Sunday would be like our Monday, the first day of the work week, the day *after* the Sabbath rest. Regardless of the actual day, for the people who greeted Jesus as he rode into the city, it was a Monday-ish kind of day.

There is a sense in which Mondays, as the first day of the work week, symbolize “business as usual”; of life resuming after a brief weekend or a Sabbath pause. Life goes on, things get back to normal, back to routine; but this does not fit the biblical narrative because the events of this day and this week were anything but normal or routine. The events of this week were extraordinary in so many ways.

For years, the church has called this event “The Triumphal Entry,” but that does not fit the biblical description very well either. When Jesus rode into the city, the crowds went wild