

# IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, April 3, 2023

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## Matthew 21:1-17

So, friends, this morning we celebrate Palm Sunday, the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. We will read in just a moment a familiar text, one that Pastor Mary just explained in short to our children. We'll read it, and then we'll have a couple of other elements there at the end. The parade is not the end of this scriptural story. So I invite you to listen to these words from the Gospel of Matthew, the 21st chapter, beginning in the first verse.

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

'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.'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!'

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'  
Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written,

"My house shall be called a house of prayer";  
but you are making it a den of robbers.'

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read,

"Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies  
you have prepared praise for yourself"?'

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He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of Our Lord endures forever. Amen.

A few months ago I spent a Friday night with about 10 Idlewild men. We went down to the FedEx forum, and, uh, and later one of those men would take a picture of our group and post it on Facebook and Instagram, and it would gain a little bit of traction amongst our Idlewild crew. We had made our way down there because we were going to go see the WWE Friday Night Smackdown show.

Friday Night Smackdown is quite the event if you've never been before. We had seats that were at this particular angle. I figured out why they were kind of cheap, because they were at this angle where we, we had what some might call an obstructed view, but for me it was perfect because we could see the entrance of the wrestlers, not them and their faces necessarily, but we could see how the crowd reacted as they entered the arena. The entrance of a wrestler is a big deal, if you didn't know that. I grew up, I was born in Charlotte, grew up in Greenville, so that was the headquarters for me in my mind of the NWA. Ric Flair was a fellow resident of Charlotte that I saw quite often, and there is not a time that I can hear 2001's theme without thinking about Ric Flair walking that aisle, or Real American Hero coming on, and thinking about Hulk Hogan doing it, or the Bell tolling and thinking about the Undertaker, or glass shattering and thinking about Stone Cold Steve Austin making his way down the ramp. Might be too... might not fit with, uh, you know, the feel of Idlewild. All right, but it's just how it is.

Anytime—I should have planned this out a little bit better (pointing to the brass quintet) maybe you know this one—the Great Gates of Kiev. Does anybody know who came out to that song? Should have had the brass play it. I didn't think about that. Say it, Jason, you know. Say it again—Jerry Lawler, Jerry The King Lawler came out to that great song.

He strutted down the aisle every Saturday morning here in Memphis, right? Monday nights as well. The entrance of a wrestler, or a wrassler—it communicates something, or it's supposed to. It's supposed to communicate, uh, how cool they are. It's supposed to...to show how powerful they are. So when the glass shattered in the late 90s and early 2000s, whoever was in the ring knew that Stone Cold Steve Austin was coming down, and they were about to get a whooping; or when the bell tolled, they knew that they were about to meet their maker The Undertaker there. It's meant to intimidate with pomp and with noise.

I was thinking about that this week I was reading through the Gospel of Matthew, admittedly an odd companion to the wrestling story.

People have seen this sort of entrance before. It's been done by a conquering king making his way back home, or even as a king that is conquering a city, coming in on horseback to a parade. A very different tenor to that parade though. Fear is in the air when it comes to the parade of a conquering king or a general as they enter a city. The people have seen it before—this parade, but

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it's not been this type of parade. Jesus offers a counter example for an entrance, not with shattered glass or a bell tolling, but humbly and peacefully on the back of a donkey and a colt. I have no idea how he rode both at the same time, but scripture tells us he did.

Humbly and peacefully he comes in, not actually intending much pomp, not trying to intimidate with great noises. But the people are moved by this entry. The people are moved enough to take off their outer garments and to lay them across the road before them, to pull branches off of the trees around them and lay them right before Jesus as he makes his way into town. This is such a... a different sort of example of an arriving Messiah that it leads the people to ask, "Who is this?" Who is this that comes in this particular way? We're used to something completely different from those who claim to have power. People have seen parades before, but they've never seen one like this. They've even seen those claiming to be Messiahs before. As Reza Aslan's work, *Zealot*, taught us about a decade ago, many people were claiming to be the Messiah in this season.

And so the people were left to ask not only who is this, but...but more so than that really, is this one any different from all the others? Will this one truly bring about the change we need? Will this one protect us, care for us, make us safe in our own homes, places of work, places of education?

The scene continues though. The parade is done. He walks into the temple, and Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers, flips the chairs of those selling doves. In this he shows God's anger at the injustice of the system, God's anger at the...the unwillingness of God's people to act against what seems like too powerful a system. You've heard before that this was an exploitative action that was taking place in the temple. It was exploiting the poor. They were receiving pennies on the dollar for the transactions that they were making in the temple. But he doesn't stop there. After he turns over the tables, you can imagine he took a seat, let's say on the chancel; and the blind and the lame start coming to him, those who have been afflicted in all sorts of ways, they start coming to him.

And unlike the other rulers that they've seen, Jesus doesn't inflict harm; he heals harm. He does it to the blind; he does it to the lame; over and over. So many start coming, in fact, that people take notice, particularly the powerful, the really religious. Actually, that's what gets him in trouble—not the parade, not the anger at turning over the tables or clearing out all the commerce from that Temple. What gets him in trouble is that he starts to heal people. He starts to care for people. He actually does something for those who are in need of care, in need of safety. And you know who notices this?

The children.

It's the youngest ones here who start to sing "Hosanna to the Son of David." It's the youngest voices in the room. They're not the ones being healed necessarily, but they...they see the significance of what Jesus is doing, and they start to shout "Hosanna to the son of David."

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And it's those voices that reach the ears of the powerful. The powerful aren't angry until the children start speaking up, because what the powerful know is that generational change might be afoot when children become present to the need for safety and care.

All of our hearts were heavy at the beginning of last week when we heard the news of Covenant Presbyterian Church and School. Many of us have all sorts of different connections to that place in Nashville.

We had our staff meeting on Tuesday morning, where we shared our highs and our lows; but we changed it up a little bit. Instead we just checked in about where we were as a staff and each individually with what had gone on in Nashville.

I shared with the crew that I was feeling pretty defeated. I wasn't alone in that, many people were. But the events in Nashville had reminded me of the work that we had done so diligently in the state of Georgia where I used to pastor. We had created from scripture an organization called Outcry; and I've told you this before, but we spent years trying to advocate for common sense legislation, and we lost over and over and over and over again.

We ultimately gave our energy and our volunteerism to EveryTown for Gun Safety and Moms Demand Action. Over and over common sense legislation was put aside. And so I told them on Tuesday morning, I was just kind of feeling like there's not much to do.

I did feel that way until I checked out social media and the news later on in the week; and a few of you were actually there—I saw your pictures—when our children took to the steps of our capital, made their way into that building, and advocated for their safety and ours.

It was the children's voices that filled the halls of that place of power. It was the children's voices that began to worry, make fearful the powerful.

But I started thinking, “Is this past week, just another parade? Or might it signify some lasting and true change?”

Because lobbyists can wait out all the noise.

Money can wait out the noise.

The parade ends.

They can wait it out until the ruckus dies down, and then where are we?

It seems to me, reading through this gospel account that Matthew lays out for us, that he is saying that the week that lies ahead for us actually has potential not just for us but for the world, because Holy Week forces us to reckon with and rest in, reckon with and rest in the fact that Christ enters into the violence of the world. He does not stay on the outside. He doesn't bring

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violence with him. He enters into it, and he proves once and for all that there actually is a different way. It is possible. Things can be different. No matter how many parades you've seen before, things can change.

And it strikes me that if we were to listen to the cries of our children from just a few days ago, those that filled the halls of our state capitol, if we were to listen to their cries, we might just hear and we might just feel the possibilities of Jesus the Christ, the possibilities that are baked into this week.

I think Brian McLaren describes the feeling as beautifully as one can. He says, "It feels like an uprising, an uprising of hope not hate, an uprising armed with love and not weapons, an uprising that shouts a joyful promise of life and peace and not angry threats of hostility and death. It's an uprising of outstretched hands not clenched fists. It's the some day we have always dreamed of emerging in the present, rising up among us and within us. It is so different from what we expected, yet it is so much better. This is what it means to be truly alive. This is what it means for us as Christians to be en route, walking the road to a new and better day."

This week affords us a particular opportunity to walk the road with Christ, to understand and recognize the violence of our world, but to claim that the God that we know in Jesus Christ not only enters into it but offers us a better way.

It seems to me that if we are to get the attention of the powerful, it begins with the...the cries of our children.

There are many things that Jesus did on his way into town, but perhaps the most important was he reminded the religious leaders, those who imagine themselves the most powerful, the most learned, he reminded them of the words of the prophet. "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself."

May we hear the voice of our children. May we be moved to action in the days ahead. May we never stop believing that a different way is not only possible, but it is the will of God.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.