

## **The Un-Triumphant Entry**    *Zechariah 9:9-12; John 12:9-24.*    Gail Galfo, Council Chair

This year, my middle-school Sunday School students are learning about the disciples. I could hear them groan during the first class – oh no, another Bible Study lesson. But as we dug deep into what kind of people the disciples were, what their characters were like, what their strengths and weaknesses were, we began to realize they were people just like you and me. They were sinners. They were broken. They were judgmental. And so we dug a little deeper to understand why Jesus had asked these men to travel with him.

Remember, the disciples were asked to join Jesus in his walks without notice, leaving their families, friends, homes and all the security they knew. So why was that? Why had God chosen these men, allowing them to perform miracles. Some of them really weren't sure Jesus was the Messiah. Some had to be shown miracle after miracle until they finally believed. And when they did - wow! They changed. And they spread the word. They started churches. They baptized in Jesus' name.

Why is this important to us today? Who cares, right? It's important because we are like the disciples - broken, judgmental, and many times slow to believe and understand. Would we stand up for Jesus if confronted, or would we run away like many of the disciples did at the crucifixion? So we can and should put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples, and really all those people we read about in our Bibles every Sunday, because we are those people. It doesn't matter that the Bible was written generations ago.

What matters is that the people in the Bible are us, and God is reaching out to us to tell us - Hey guys, follow me, and it'll be okay. But he lets us see the trials and tribulations of others so that we can learn. And he also wants us to know he can get very angry when we travel down the wrong road. So listen carefully as we head into John's recounting of Jesus' un-triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He didn't ride in on decorated horses. He didn't wear a crown and a purple robe. He was probably in tattered clothes, had dirty hair, and was tired after having traveled for so long. He was riding on a borrowed donkey. He didn't even own it!

There are those who enthusiastically welcome Jesus as he enters the city of Jerusalem on Sunday as "*the King of Israel.*" However, by Friday, in the same city he will hear a different sort of crowd crying "*We have no king, but Caesar!*" The people who cried out "*Hosanna*" (save now!) on Sunday will be shoved aside on Friday by others who will say, "*He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one!*"

Jesus' entry into the city was more humble than triumphant, but is a very significant event in the life of our Lord, and in the history of the nation Israel. It is one of the very few events which is recorded in all four Gospels in the New Testament. But why does God want us to learn about it? In John's gospel, a different set of details are given regarding Jesus' ministry in the weeks that precede his final appearance in Jerusalem. We know he healed a blind man, and we know the story about the Good Shepherd. He also made a quick and dangerous trip to Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem, where He raised Lazarus from the dead.

But in John's gospel, much of Jesus' time was spent away from Jerusalem, in out-of-the-way places so that the religious leaders couldn't arrest and kill him before it was his time. John doesn't tell us how Jesus pre-arranged for two of His disciples to procure the donkey and its colt. Further, John doesn't tell us that the Pharisees insist Jesus silence those who are praising Him, and that Jesus refuses, telling them if He does so, the "*rocks would cry out.*" John doesn't tell us of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem or His cursing of the barren fig tree. And strangely, John does not mention our Lord's cleansing of the temple. John does not mention the miracles of Jesus' healing performed in the temple the final week of his ministry.

John doesn't dig into any of the parables that Jesus taught this final week of His earthly life, nor does he recall any of the Lord's numerous debates with others that dealt with prophecy concerning the last days. Jesus' agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane isn't even mentioned by John. John limits his focus to three important incidents that occurred during Jesus' final week of his earth's ministry – Mary's anointing of Jesus in preparation for His burial; His entry into Jerusalem and the request of the Greeks to meet with Jesus.

To us, there's value in instant replay. When an official in football has just thrown the yellow flag, he indicates the ball carrier stepped out of bounds, or that the pass receiver did not get both feet down before stepping out of bounds. The instant replay clarifies the facts because we're able to see the play in slow motion, and from different camera angles. This is what the four Gospel accounts of our Lord's life provide for us. By comparing them, we see this entry from four different angles.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus cries as he looks upon the city of Jerusalem. He weeps, because he knows their reception of Him is superficial and momentary. Because of the crowds in and around the temple, Jesus is able to minister and teach without being arrested. But each day, Jesus leaves Jerusalem and returns to Bethany where he feels he's out of the reach of those who want to arrest him. The people in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as their king, but as it turns out, their rulers conclude they were mistaken. Jesus was not the kind of king the rulers supposed Him to be. He was claiming to be Israel's Messiah by his triumphal entry, and the common people accepted Him as Messiah, but the Messiah they hoped for was not the Jesus-kind of Messiah.

And so, by the end of that week, those who hailed Jesus as their King will desert him, while others will cry out “*we have no king but Caesar.*” Jesus would then be mockingly worshipped as the King of Israel. This was a tragedy for the nation Israel for a time, but it proved to be a great blessing for the Gentiles. The Gentiles (or Greeks) were outsiders with respect to the blessings God had promised Israel. The Greeks could, of course, enter into these blessings as Jews by abandoning their own heritage and becoming proselytes or converts, but they could not enter into the blessings of Israel as Gentiles - until now!

It is Israel’s mistaken reaction to our Lord, their rejection of Him as their Messiah, which opened the door for the Gentiles to enter into Israel’s blessings as Gentiles. Israel’s mistake would be painful for the Jews, but it would be a great blessing to the Gentiles. It’s important to note that not only did the Greeks merely wish to look at Jesus, but they wanted to speak to Him.

They have heard about the miracles Jesus has performed, especially raising Lazarus from the dead. Many of the Greeks wondered if Jesus was the Savior they had been seeking, and wanted to hear from Him directly concerning what kind of relationship they might have with Him, since they were Greeks. Both of the disciples they approached, Philip and Andrew, had Greek names and John tells us that Philip was from Bethsaida, a town in Galilee which had Greek neighbors just over the border. If any of the disciples might be inclined to lend a sympathetic ear to the Greeks, Philip would be the most likely.

So the Greeks approached Philip, who whispers in Jesus’ ear that there were some Greeks in the crowd who would like to talk to him. Jesus replied “*The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of what falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain.*” I don’t think this is the response Philip was expecting, and Jesus appears to ignore the request of the Greeks. But the point is really quite simple. Jesus employs an agricultural image which enables His audience to grasp the principle as illustrated in everyday terms.

You can preserve a grain of wheat in a jar indoors and protect it from the elements and corruption, but doing so won’t produce a crop of wheat. On the other hand, you can place the same grain of wheat in the ground, leaving it to die. The “death” of this seed will produce “*much fruit.*” So Jesus wanted the crowd to understand that He could only save man by giving up His life and experiencing the death penalty for sin in the sinner’s place. So it was not the Lord’s coronation that would save many, but His death. And it was not His acceptance by Israel, but His rejection by them, that would produce much fruit which is still being enjoyed by us today.

### Mid-Week Devotional

*"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts, "Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones..."*

#### **Zechariah 13:7**

History is full of symbols that tell us the story of the old fading out and the new coming in...the British laying down their arms at Yorktown...the Berlin Wall coming down. When we see pictures like these, we know that history has taken place and peoples' lives will change. Pictures tell a story and often a ruler will cast about for the right picture to tell the story of his regime to his people. This was the case with Solomon who took the throne in Jerusalem some 900 years before Christ (1 Kings 1).

Solomon's father, David, had been a warrior king who took his throne after a long and bitter civil war against the family of Saul, Israel's first king. Late in David's life, after one of his own sons had attempted to take power, David decided to designate Solomon as the new king. And to show that Solomon was not just another greedy son trying to upstage his father, David sent him to the city gate, not on a warrior's steed with soldiers, but on David's own mule surrounded by just a few of David's closest advisors. No one in his right mind would approach the city like this unless he already had David's approval to reign.

So the crowds recognized that Solomon must be the rightful king and paraded him into the city with a huge celebration. And his peaceful ascent to power on his father's mule became the symbol of Solomon's whole reign. The Bible says about Solomon that God “*gave him peace on every side.*” The Bible also says in the prophet Zechariah that, when the Messiah came, it would be a peaceful regime change like Solomon's. He'll show up without an army, on a donkey colt, ready to begin his reign as “*the Prince of Peace.*”

And just like in Solomon's day, when Jesus appeared, the people got it. They lay their coats on the road, they wave palm branches and sing “*Hosanna!*” They recognize that, like Solomon, Jesus is the Son of David, the person chosen by God as the rightful ruler of the kingdom. So they shout, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” So it is no surprise that Jerusalem back then was stirred by the arrival of a new regime in the city center. As in other capitals after a regime change, the common people held their breath waiting to see what the new regime would bring. But last Sunday, in John's gospel, Jesus taught his disciples the terrible truth. He would win them a kingdom only at the cost of his life: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*” And he will teach us in the weeks to come that we will build his kingdom only at the cost of our own lives.