

Palm Sunday 2017 Matthew 21:1-11

As always, I invite you to listen closely to find yourself, and our world, in today's story.

What, or who, do we think will restore us,
And will help us begin – again?

The Gospel story we just heard begins on a lovely spring day in about the year 3790 on the Hebrew Calendar, or what we would call somewhere around 30 A.D.

It was the beginning - - The beginning of the final part of our story of salvation. According to Matthew, the city of Jerusalem was in bad shape. When Jesus and his friends arrived that day, they were met not just by the large crowds attending the annual Passover celebration, longing for freedom from oppression once more, but by an entire city that was in turmoil.

That is how Matthew describes it. Turmoil. The Romans, on high alert, were persecuting the Jews who were gathered by the thousands. The Temple leaders had called for the arrest and murder of Jesus. Turmoil. Translated, it meant "the earth was shaking." This is the same word Matthew uses to describe what happened at the moment of Jesus' death - and - when the angel rolled the stone away from his tomb.

Those waiting for the Messiah could not think of a better time for his arrival. The detail about throwing their coats on the ground is a way to say they were hopeful that this was their new king. Most expected the Messiah, while coming in peace, to also be a great political and military leader who would free them from the tyranny of the Roman Empire.

The last king to have this treatment was Jehu, in Second Kings. After the cloaks were laid before him and he was proclaimed king, he immediately mounted his horse drawn chariot, which is the steed of war, proceeded to assassinate competing leaders, raise up an army and massacre the Royal Family. And he was only just beginning. Is this who they thought Jesus might be?

The Messiah they were waiting for will bring an end to all suffering, teach the world to revere truth and return to God. To restore the leadership - - in government, the social order, and worship - - back to the Temple. All forms of warfare will be abolished. He will be the messenger for God's redemption. That was what they were really waiting for.

And in rides Jesus - one of many itinerant preachers of the day, rumored to be wise, who they called "the prophet Jesus of Nazareth" who performed miracles. Here he came, on a donkey.

Which are what rulers of the day rode-in-on in peace. Behold - your king is coming. Could this really be their new beginning? Hosanna! They cried. Save us!

A joyful exclamation that sounds like a prayer. The earth is shaking. Make it stop. Save us.

During this Lenten season Brother Sean Martin has taught us in adult forum that to understand the very beginning of this church and her people is to truly understand what Jesus is demanding of us - and we must never stop seeking this knowledge.

At our Lenten Dinner series the Reverend David Fly explored our stories with us, reminding us that we are on an amazing journey with friends, enemies, lovers and strangers, and we have a legacy of faith that will live far beyond our days.

Bishop Curry asked us to reach out, to reach over, to have a revival of relationships that can heal our world. And now Jesus comes into the chaos on a donkey, with her foal, showing us in sacred humility how to bring peace into the turmoil. To stop the earth from shaking.

The story continues throughout this holy week. I encourage you to return Thursday for another dose of humility, Friday for more chaos, then to the vigil Saturday to hear your salvation history from the top. Easter Sunday – well – I don't want to give anything away, but you don't want to miss the ending. Because in it, you will find our beginnings once more.

Let's pray.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.

Amen