

Matthew 21:1-11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.^[a]" ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ "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."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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!"

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

"WHEN THE WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN"

On the first Palm Sunday Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread palm branches on the road. The crowds were crying out to Jesus, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Matthew chapter 21 verses 10 and 11, "When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking "Who is this?" It's ironic that Jesus' entry caused such turmoil. After all, he was the King of Peace. Now some people were trembling with excitement as they anticipated being set free from the Roman occupiers. They would be disappointed because Jesus came to set us all free in a far more profound way. The religious and political leaders were quite shaken by Jesus' coming. They feared him and sought a way to get rid of him. In any event, the whole city was thrown into turmoil by Jesus' coming. But here's another irony. The very One who caused such turmoil is the very one who helps us in our turmoil. King Jesus is helping us in this time of great turmoil.

Turmoil certainly describes this time we are in. The power of evil has unleashed the coronavirus on the world with devastating consequences. On Saturday March 7, I was in downtown Toronto, ate at a busy restaurant, visited a bookstore, and attended a concert with over 1,000 people. The next day we celebrated my mother's 95th birthday in her retirement home with 80 invited guests. That was less than a month ago. The extent to which the whole world has been turned upside down is hard to grasp. National leaders are scrambling as they try to provide both hope and realism. The economy is in turmoil. The health care system and medical personnel are stretched to the limit. Our workplaces and our schools have been turned upside down. So too with our home life. We feel inner turmoil as we wonder about our personal finances. And even if we are not ill, we fear that a loved one might catch this potentially deadly virus.

Now on a lighter note, pet dogs are apparently quite thrilled by all this. Apparently dogs are very happy that their owners are home all day. Some wag their tails so vigorously that the tails become sprained and require the attention of a veterinarian. Household pets must be a real comfort for people in these days. We see many people out walking their dogs and what a wonderful variety of dogs we see, so happy and playful. I envy their lightness of spirit. But for humans that doesn't seem possible or appropriate now. Thankfully we have a helper when the world is turned on its head and his Name is Jesus, King Jesus. Jesus Christ is helping us in these days of turmoil.

Here's one way he is helping us. It's by walking with us in the turmoil.

Jesus' life was marked by turmoil right from the earliest days. Remember his birth under very difficult circumstances in a Bethlehem stable and the subsequent flight to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous wrath. His ministry was marked by turmoil. There was the turmoil of the temptations in the wilderness, the storms at sea, the opposition and misunderstanding and the threat of death, even in his own hometown.

But all this was quite mild compared to the turmoil he faced in Jerusalem during Holy week. Now for a brief time he threw the temple into turmoil as he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and set the sacrificial animals free. The opposition against him only intensified. There was the great turmoil in his soul as he wrestled with his Father in prayer in Gethsemane. There was the turmoil of betrayal and abandonment; even by his closest friends; the turmoil of his arrest and trial and flogging; the turmoil as he stumbled under the heavy cross on his way to Calvary; and the turmoil of his death in which he not only suffered great physical pain but also unspeakable spiritual distress as bore our sins in in his own sinless body. Five days after hearing the Palm Sunday cries of "Hosanna" he heard a different crowd cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Talk about having your life turned upside down in a short period of time. He expected all this turmoil and he accepted it because it was all for our sake.

“Who is he?” they asked. The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” The New Testament answer is even more complete. “This is the Son of God, crucified, risen from the dead, the ever-living King, who is forever with and for his people.”

The King who experienced the worst turmoil ever is with us in this turmoil. We may be surprised by it but our King is not. He knows our turmoil because he lived it and is living it now. He is walking with us and sustaining us as we look to him in faith. He is blessing us with hope and peace and light and strength along the way. When people ask, “Where is God in all this?” we can truthfully answer – through the living Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit God is right here, walking with us through the valley of turmoil. Our victorious Lord is with us in this battle. His banner is raised over us, the banner of love. He is leading us through the valley of turmoil to higher ground. And one day we will see and know the victory he is bringing about.

So king Jesus is helping us in this time of turmoil by walking with us. *He is also helping us by his example.*

How did he deal with the great turmoil he experienced during that week in Jerusalem?

First, by relying on the companionship of his friends.

The Gospels tell us that during Holy Week Jesus taught in the temple during the day. In the evening Jesus left Jerusalem and went out to the city of Bethany, no doubt spending the nights at the home of his friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus. During the week his disciples were always nearby, either as he taught in the Temple or spent time out on the Mount of Olives. At the Last Supper he sat with his disciples and said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...” And when he was in spiritual agony in Gethsemane, he wanted his closest friends not too far away. They kept falling asleep but their presence seemed to be a comfort to him. Yes, Jesus’ friends eventually abandoned him after his arrest. But while they were nearby Jesus valued and relied on their companionship.

We have spoken of this before, but in the time of turmoil, the comfort of friends and family is so vitally important. Problems always seem magnified when you are alone. But somehow they become smaller and more manageable when you are with others. Their very presence brings you strength and courage. Even though we can’t be together as a church family we are seeking to keep in touch with one another and to support one another. Just as Jesus relied on the companionship of his friends during his time of turmoil, so we can rely on one another in these days. The companionship and support of family and friends is truly invaluable.

Here’s one more thing Jesus did in the turmoil. He kept on trusting God. From Gethsemane to that terrible brief time of forsakenness on the cross Jesus’ thoughts and

words were directed to God. Even as he took his dying breath he said in faith, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Through all the darkness and turmoil, Jesus held fast to God. He kept on trusting in God's love and God's goodness. Jesus trusted that God had something more to do and that he would do it. And he did. The darkness of Good Friday gave way to the bright hope of Easter morning. God raised his Son from the grave in the decisive victory over the power of sin and death. Jesus was crowned by his Father as King forever, the King of love. Jesus' faith in God was finally and completely vindicated.

Next week we will celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It may not be quite as joy filled as usual, especially since we will not be celebrating it together as a congregation. So we may say that Easter will be a little late this year. But actually we will yet have second Easter this year, when God restores us as a worshipping congregation. We will stand together in his presence as a joyful people and say "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In these times of turmoil Jesus' example surely speaks to us. This is not a time to fling away from God in doubt and despair but a time to draw nearer to God in faith and confident trust. And our faith will surely be vindicated. Yes, King Jesus is helping us in these days of turmoil by his presence and by his example.

Recently some of the great hymns of the faith have been speaking to my heart and mind. As we close here are a few verses from one of Isaac Watts' great hymns.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guide while troubles last,
and our eternal home.