

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020**  
**Rev. Mark McLennan**

**“A BEAUTIFUL MIND”**

Some of the fondest memories I have in leading worship come from Palm Sundays over the years.

I have carried children on my shoulders, standing up.

I have carried children on my back, on all fours, like a donkey.

Children have waved palms, and baseball caps, as we paraded around the sanctuaries of churches from Alberta to Nova Scotia.

One of those children, who is now the mother of teenagers herself, wrote me a note a few years ago, saying that every year that her extended family [three sisters, all with children of their own] gets together on Palm Sunday, they reminisce about those Palm Sunday parades around the church.

Mostly, I remember that it was just a lot of fun!

The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams

Today the Christian church around the world celebrates one of the most colorful events of its faith heritage - the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

When Matthew tells the story in his Gospel, he becomes so caught up in the spirit of the occasion, he has Jesus riding on two animals instead of one.

Verse 7: *"The disciples brought the donkey and the colt and spread their cloaks upon them, and Jesus sat on them."*

Please do not try to resolve this conundrum in your mind.

Matthew's exuberance is balanced by his careful attention to the historical magnitude of the moment.

He quotes not just one prophet but two, both Zechariah and Isaiah.

He wants to make it clear that the Messiah, the Savior for whom the people have waited so long, is the one who is coming into the city.

‘Tell the daughter of Zion, *"Look, your king is coming to you mounted on a donkey."* ‘

The point is unmistakable.

Royalty is on the way, but it is the kind of royalty that people have never seen before.

The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams

Two thousand years after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, another visitor came to the city, Germany's last kaiser, Wilhelm II.

His entourage was so grand that he had to have the Jaffe Gate in the old city widened so that his over-sized carriage could pass through.

After the parade had ended, someone climbed up and attached a large sign to the gate.

The sign read, *"A better man than Wilhelm came through this city's gate. He rode on a donkey."*

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What made Jesus a better man, do you think?

What was it about him that compelled the people to spread their cloaks and wave their branches in the air?

What is it about him that still inspires millions of people to give their lives to him and even for him?

Nowhere has the paradoxical beauty of the mind of Christ been more eloquently expressed than by Paul in his Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2:

*"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

What made him a better man?

It was his beautiful mind, which was nothing less than the very mind of God.

His beautiful mind put him on the back of that donkey.

\* His beautiful mind gave him the courage to speak the message of salvation no matter what it cost.

\* His beautiful mind opened his eyes so that he could see the people who were being put down or shut out by unjust practices and selfish ambitions on the part of others.

\* His beautiful mind led him to overturn the tables of the money changers in the temple, led him to cure the blind and the lame.

\* His beautiful mind brought him to his knees before the disciples so that he could wash their feet on the night of his betrayal.

\* His mind led him to the cross where he poured out his life.

*"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,"* Paul admonished his friends in Philippi.

If you want to belong to him, the first thing you will need to do is get your mind right.

Can we live that way too?

Paul thought we could.

*"Have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus,"* he said.

But not in the sense of transplanting that divine perspective into ourselves through our own efforts; certainly, that is impossible.

No, it is this sense of receiving the gift of transformation that I am speaking of today - receiving transformation through him who became completely one of us and, thereby, defeated everything.

What does a Christ-like mind look like as we live in the world?

We can see it clearly in the great saints and martyrs, such as Mother Teresa or Desmond Tutu, or Nelson Mandela.

But also:

An artist becomes lost in the work. Lovers become lost in their beloved.

A musician is totally engaged with the words or music he or she created.

Workers are excited about a common enterprise.

You toss aside that part of yourself that is always watching how you're doing.

In self-forgetfulness, you become most fully yourself.

This is the great paradox of human existence.

The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams

In the years that I've been a minister, I have known some 'winning' churches and lots of 'winners' in them.

One who comes to mind is a young man in my first congregation, an advertising executive on the rise in his profession.

Every Tuesday night he volunteered at the foot clinic for the homeless people who made their home in our church gymnasium.

Robert was his name. He was the nattiest dresser I had ever seen.

I can picture him now in my mind's eye, wearing a crisp shirt, red suspenders.

I see him sitting on a stool before the chair on which one of our homeless guests is sitting.

He takes the guest's feet and places them in a basin of warm water.

He takes a towel and dries the feet. He applies ointment to their sores.

The ritual ends with the gift of a clean, white pair of socks.

I see the man in the chair, as he slips his socks on, brush a tear from his own cheek - a tough guy whom no one has touched with tenderness in a very long time.

I once asked Robert, the advertising executive on the move, why he came to the foot clinic every week.

He brushed me aside, saying,

*"I figure I have a better chance of running into Jesus here than most places. That's all."*

I watched him week after week.

I realized as I watched him that I was developing my own sort of double vision.

I was seeing Christ in the stranger that he served.

I was also seeing Christ in the one who was finding deep meaning in his life through serving others.

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To see what the world cannot see and then to do something about it - these are the marks of the mind of Christ.

Why did Jesus ride that little donkey into town that day?

I think he did it to demonstrate true greatness to all the world.

After the donkey came the cross.

And it is there, right there, that you see greatness in all its glory.

Oh, my! What a journey he had.

Before the suffering and the crucifying and the dying, he entered Jerusalem and all the city was *in turmoil*, Matthew tells us.

English words are entirely too mild for the original meaning of this word "*turmoil*."

In Greek the word was usually used in reference to violent changes in the weather or earthquakes.

In other words, Jesus comes into town and the whole world shakes.

A fundamental shift takes place at the heart of things, and nothing is ever the same again.

I hope the parade will pass down your street today.  
I hope your heart will bow before him.

I hope your hosannas will ring to highest heaven.

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna to the Son of David.*

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST, AND HOLY SPIRIT...AMEN

### **Matthew 21:1-11**

"Jesus didn't come to take over Pilate's system; he came to replace it.  
When we confess that Jesus is Lord and Christ, the anointed king, we are leaving  
no room for the Pilates of this world."

### **Offering Quote**

*In the time one is given, the steward must make the most of the talents one is  
given by the Lord.*

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, former President of the Philippines

### **APPROACH**

God of all people and all places, God in all situations and every time:

you are the light of the minds that know you;

you are the strength of those who serve you;

you are the welcome and rest of those who go in search of you.

We come this day to pause from our responsibilities and our concerns, to listen  
for your voice, to follow your story, and worship you as the Creator, Christ, and  
Spirit.

God of love and mercy, we confess that we have become totally pre-occupied  
with this pandemic, and its myriad problems and consequences.

COVID -19 is dominating our thoughts and our living every day.

Forgive us, and bring us back to a place where we can give you the first place in  
our thoughts and our lives, in the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Amen

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

God dares us to think like Jesus, knowing that if we do, we will discover the gifts  
we can offer, the words of hope we can share, the grace we can use to bless  
those around us.

God hears our prayers, listens to our hearts, fills us with forgiveness,  
and walks with us in these moments - and in all the ones to come.

Thanks be to God for such incredible mercy! Amen.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Precious Lord, as we follow Jesus on the path to Calvary, we join our voices, our hearts, our minds and our souls in offering thanks and praise for this most holy week.

We give thanks for this good country in which we live:

For our medical system, which is helping so many in critical need

For frontline medical workers, risking their own wellbeing to serve others.

For our leaders, seeking to make good decisions, benefitting all citizens

For our municipal workers, who are keeping the lights on, the furnace running, and fresh water flowing.

For good and faithful Christians, in our own congregation and beyond, who are serving others, faithfully, in new and creative ways.

Above all, Dear Lord, we give thanks for the path you followed, the journey you made, and for your sacrifice for us.

We remember your love poured over us, and we rejoice.

*Hosanna! Hallelujah!*

This day, and every day, we pray:

For our distraught world, facing the coronavirus;

for countries hardest hit, especially China, Italy, Spain, and the United States;

for those who are sick and suffering in our own country, province, and community;

for those who grieve their dead; for the sick and their families;

for those fearful of an unknown future; for the millions of unemployed;

for children at home, that they be safe from abuse;

for those who have been led to rely on empty remedies;

for hospitals, in their desperate need for supplies;

### **COVID-19: A Prayer of Solidarity**

For all who have contracted coronavirus, We pray for care and healing.

For those who are particularly vulnerable, We pray for safety and protection.

For all who experience fear or anxiety, We pray for peace of mind and spirit.

For affected families who are facing difficult decisions between food on the table or public safety, We pray for policies that recognize their plight.

For those who do not have access to adequate medical services, We pray that no family will face such burdens alone, and that solutions may be found.

For those who are afraid to access care due to immigration status, We pray for recognition of the God-given dignity of all.

For our brothers and sisters around the world, We pray for shared solidarity.

For public officials and decisionmakers, We pray for wisdom and guidance.

Triune God, during this time may your Church be a sign of hope, comfort and love to all.

Grant peace. Grant comfort. Grant healing.

Be with us, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread,*

*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*

*Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil,*

*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.*

*Amen.*

### **BENEDICTION**

May the grace of Christ attend you,

and the love of God surround you,

and the Holy Spirit Keep you,

now and ever.

**Amen.**