

## A Troubled World

Matthew 21:1-11

April 5, 2020

As you read this sermon, I want to let you know that all of you are in my thoughts and prayers. We now have more than 163,000 cases of Covid19 in the United States and more than 6,000 cases in California. Many are gravely ill and many have died. It was reported that in Italy the doctors are asking for tablets for the patients who were dying to record their last words. The family cannot be near them so the patients were recording their last words on the tablets. We are facing a tragic situation. Schools remain closed. People's travel plans have been canceled. Life is disrupted in major ways.

Coronavirus has crushed the economy and the financial markets. This virus turned the whole world into turmoil. You know, the word "turmoil" communicates a sense of tension, nervousness, anxiety, pressure and danger. That is what we feel.

Actually "turmoil" was the word Matthew used to describe Jerusalem when Jesus entered the city on Palm Sunday. Our text verse 10 reads, "When he (Jesus) entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil..."

In Greek the word that is translated as "turmoil" is *seio*. It means to shake, to quake or to agitate. In other words, Jesus's entrance into the city had brought tension, nervousness and anxiety to the city. I am sure some were excited with a heightened hope and some with intensified anxiety.

The crowd shouted "Hosanna" – "save us now!" while waving palm branches and laying down their cloaks on Jesus' path. They were welcoming the Messiah, the one who would deliver Israel from foreign oppressions.

As the crowd waved the palm branches and shouted "Hosanna" they probably remembered the Maccabees' victory which happened about two hundred years prior over the brutal Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus had not only forbidden the practice of Judaism in Israel but also had defiled the Jewish temple by offering sacrifices to Zeus and had sacrificed the animals that were prohibited by the Jews in 167 BC on the altar. This started a revolt against Antiochus by a priest named Mattathias and his five sons. Against all odds, the Israelites won the war. They cleansed and rededicated the temple. This victory brought Israel

independence and autonomy. When they won this war, the Israelites celebrated their victory with waving palm branches and singing joyous songs.<sup>1</sup>

However, this independence was short lived. The Romans came and Israel was once again under foreign oppression. It was in that situation Jesus made his grand entry into the city of Jerusalem.

It was the lamb selection day. Each family would choose a lamb for sacrifice for the Passover on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, which is known to us as Palm Sunday. In order for everyone to observe that the lamb was without blemish, it must be visible for 4 days before it was killed for the Passover Feast

Because it was close to Passover, Jerusalem and its vicinity was packed with people from all over the world who were there to celebrate the Passover. By that time, Jesus was already a celebrity. There was hardly anyone who did not hear about Jesus, even among the people who came from afar. He was the talk of the city. The majority of the people who were there at that time wished Jesus would start and lead a revolution against Rome and free the Israelites. And when they saw Jesus was coming to the city riding on a donkey, people went wild. No doubt that they remembered Zechariah's prophecy that says:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”<sup>2</sup>

The crowd believed, or at least hoped, that Jesus would bring them a political liberation from the Romans just like the Maccabees did almost two hundred years before.

The people expected a major military action against the Romans. Even Jesus' disciples expected him to make the move, to start the revolution, to vanquish their enemies. The two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus did not recognize the resurrected Jesus when they met him. But they communicated the general sentiment of the people about Jesus saying, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”<sup>3</sup> When the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples before

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<sup>1</sup> I Maccabees 13:51.

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah 9:9.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:21.

his ascension, the disciples still asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?”<sup>4</sup> That was the predominant and overarching mood of the city.

But soon, the crowd realized that was not what Jesus intended to do. So some of the crowd turned away from him in disappointment; and much of the crowd turned against him in anger. Their joyous excitement and hope turned into disappointment, disillusionment, and frustration. No wonder the ones who sang Hosannas on Palm Sunday shouted “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” on Good Friday!

Even for the religious leaders, Jesus was a source of turmoil, not just for the city but for their own lives. Jesus called them “hypocrites” and “sons of vipers.” Not exactly comforting or assuring words. Jesus’ popularity, the manner in which he entered the city and the crowd’s response were all very disturbing to them. They certainly joined the crowd in shouting “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” It was Caiaphas one of the high priests who said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” This was the religious leader’s view. It was better for them to eliminate the source of disturbance than to face it.

What about us? Do we find Jesus disturbing our lives? Do we find ourselves in the crowd who shouted out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”?

Fleming Rutledge in her book, *The Bible and the New York Times*, tells about the time on Palm Sunday when her church enacted the scene in Pilate court yard. The church attendees were playing the part of the crowd shouting “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” There was a woman in her church who refused to participate in this reenactment. She would not come to church on Palm Sunday because they are doing this reenactment.

“I just can’t do it!” the woman explained.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 1:6.

Rutledge says, “I always felt very sad for her. She had missed the whole point. She could have come to church every other Sunday of the year and she still would have missed the whole point...It was very important to her to think of herself as one of the righteous. She could not confront her own darkness. How sad this is. If she but knew it, there is great power in the act of repentance.”<sup>5</sup>

Can we confront our own darkness? Can we confront our need for repentance? When Christ comes to us to confront our search for status, power, money, and image, how do we respond to him? When Christ confronts us, we realize that we need to examine our lives, examine our goals, examine our hopes and dreams, and examine what it is that we are living for. What we are searching for and pursuing, are they really the things that give us meaning and fulfillment in life? What is it that is really important in our lives? When Christ confronts us, will we respond with penitence and humbleness?

Edward Grinnan tells about his mother in an article in Daily Guideposts. His mother was suffering with Alzheimer’s disease. When it became impossible for her to live by herself, he moved her into an assisted living facility. After about a week, Edward got a call from the supervisor of the facility saying that his mother had been stealing from other people. Socks, candy bars, T-shirts. Nothing big, except that one lady’s silver cross was missing, and they knew it was his mother who took it.

Edward could not believe it. His mother was the most honest person he knew. She was the person of integrity and deep faith.

The next time he visited her, he gently chided her for the pilfering. “Mom, you have to stop taking things from other people.” “Did you take that cross?” She shook her head, “No.” “Are you sure about that?” he pressed.

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<sup>5</sup> (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), pp. 126, 129. Cited by Javier Viera, <http://www.mamaroneckumc.org/2003sermons/0413.htm>.

After a pause, his mother reached into her purse and pulled out the small silver cross. It was similar to the one she had herself. She set it down on the table and stared at it. “I wasn’t trying to steal,” was all the explanation she gave.

He turned over the cross to the supervisor, apologizing. “Don’t, please don’t,” she said. “Your mom is just trying to hold on to things that mean the most to her.” So, next time when Edward visited his mother, he brought his mother’s small silver cross. She stopped stealing after that.

As her condition continued to decline, she was moved to a different facility. She had forgotten almost everything, except how to pray. She even led prayers on Friday morning. She prayed with people whenever she had an opportunity. And she always had her silver cross in her hand. When she died, her cross was in her hand.<sup>6</sup> She held on to what was important to her. It was the cross and the crucified Christ.

The question for us is, “What is the most important thing for us? Our status, power, money, image, or belonging to Christ?”

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily Guideposts* (Nashville, TN: Ideals Publications, 2006), p. 73.