

Palm Sunday 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Philippians 2.5-11 St. Matthew 21.1-13

✠

Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem was not a show of power, but a symbolic display of humility, peace, and royalty. If we were to compare the donkey to a modern day car...Jesus would be driving into the church parking lot in a practical unpretentious car...like a Honda Civic. Jesus would have rejected the impressive luxury of a presidential motorcade or the pomp and circumstance of a gilded carriage. Jesus was all about making himself accessible to the people.

This morning we recreated the first Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We sang a hymn and processed around the church carrying palm crosses. We declared Jesus to be our Good and Gracious King. His humble procession into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy written by the Prophet Zechariah 600 years earlier...

...“Look, your King is coming to you...He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9.9)

All four of the Gospel writers record Jesus' riding into Jerusalem but only Matthew has Jesus riding on a “colt the foal of a donkey”. The colt was a young male donkey that likely had never been ridden before. The mother donkey was there to keep the young donkey calm. Jesus chose to ride the young donkey to show he was coming as a peaceful king...not a military leader ready to wage war.

The Nubian Donkey is one of the ancestors of modern-day domestic donkey. It has a dark stripe down the spine and a perpendicular stripe across the shoulders. The stripes resemble a cross. Unfortunately, the Nubian Donkey has not been seen in the wild since 1970 and is now considered extinct.

What kind of King is Jesus? He is not the kind of king the crowd on that first Palm Sunday were expecting. They wanted another human king like David to lead them in a revolt against the Roman government. Jesus and his humble donkey ride made it clear his kingdom was not of this earth. That turned the crowd against him and got him killed. We will recreate that first Good Friday and the execution of our Good and Gracious King in a few days...in this very place.

About 1100 years before the events of the first Palm Sunday, God's people came to the Prophet Samuel and said they wanted a king just like all of the pagan kings in foreign countries around them. They wanted a king they could see and hear and touch. They were tired of having God as their ruler...they wanted a human to rule them. Samuel was upset by what the people wanted. But God told Samuel to give them what they wanted and said...

*... "The people are not rejecting you...they are rejecting me as their King."
(1 Samuel 8.7ff)*

God then told Samuel to tell the people what they should expect from their human king...

... "Their sons will be drafted and sent off to fight a war in a foreign country and die.

... Their daughters will be forced to work for the king in the palace, and cook and clean and make the palace smell nice for him.

... They will be unfairly taxed and their land will be confiscated.

... The king will not listen when they complain."

The people didn't pay attention to what Samuel was saying...they got their human king.

What part do we play in the drama called "Holy Week"? Through the parish liturgies...we will transform as best we can in this very place...the Jerusalem of 2000 years ago. We will pray and fast as he did. We will be with him on Maundy Thursday to hear and obey his command to love others as much as he loves us, and to receive with thanksgiving his Body and Blood. We will be with him at the cross on Good Friday. We will wait with Mary and his friends for what's next.

The powerful words of our closing hymn compels us to continue our Lenten journey with Jesus as he rides his donkey to the cross. And when he has finished his mission of Redemption of mankind, our God will take his power and reign.

Jesus is indeed our Good and Gracious King!

✠