

"Good News Inspires Us to Action" - Rev. Adam Hange - 26.3.29

It's Passover week in Jerusalem, and the city is buzzing.

Pilgrims have walked for days to get here — faithful Jews coming from all over the region to remember the story at the heart of their identity:

*that God heard the cries of an oppressed people, **and was moved!***

And the Roman governor of Judea, a man named Pontius Pilate, knows exactly what that story does to a crowd.

So, every Passover, he makes a point. He marches in from the west into Jerusalem— with cavalry and foot soldiers, banners snapping in the wind, armor catching the sun, trumpets announcing what everyone already knows:

Rome is here. Rome is watching. Rome will not hesitate.

It is a masterclass in intimidation.

The message is simple:

You can have your Passover holiday, and remember that God once liberated your ancestors.

But do not forget, we are armed. And we are ready. Just try us... and find out...

(Like King George, “sending a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love!”)

(Break)

Meanwhile... On the other side of the city, something else is happening.

A man named Jesus and his disciples are coming down the Mount of Olives, approaching Jerusalem from the east.

What happens next is not spontaneous, but actually *pre-planned*. Jesus has sent two disciples ahead to find a specific animal — a colt that has never been ridden.

To tell the owners, the Lord needs it... and will return it to you...

Now, I want you to think about that for a moment. If you have ever witnessed someone try to ride a horse that has never been ridden — or, frankly, if you have ever put a determined toddler on a pony for the first time — you understand that this is not a recipe for *dignity*.

And Jesus knows this. This is not an accident. This is not improvisation.

This is a *bit*.

Here's what I think we miss when we read this story too reverently: **Jesus was funny.**

Not funny like a nervous joke to break the ice. Funny like *John Oliver* laying out a twelve-minute takedown, complete with charts and a puppet. Funny like *SNL* doing a cold open that everyone's quoting on Monday morning. Funny like Stephen Colbert doing an impersonation so perfectly that the mockery becomes impossible to ignore.

Jesus is doing a sketch. He is staging a parody of Pilate's military procession, and every faithful pilgrim in that crowd — people who knew their scripture — would have recognized it immediately.

Because Zechariah 9:9 was not obscure. "**Your king** comes to you, triumphant, riding on a colt."

They knew it. Jesus knew they knew it. And so he plays it completely straight, which is what makes it all the more devastating.

Pilate enters with cavalry. Jesus enters on a borrowed donkey. Pilate has trumpets. Jesus has fishermen singing folk songs. Pilate has a thousand soldiers. Jesus has a crowd in sandals, throwing their cloaks in the road because that's all they have.

Pilate is doing Caesar. Jesus is doing *Caesar*, with a wink.

This tradition is as old as power itself.

And this past Fall, outside the ICE building in Portland, it showed up in inflatable frog costumes. *Frogs*. Like the plague visited on Pharaoh when he refused to let the people go. It was ridiculous. It was joyful. It was *deeply* biblical and prophetically imaginative

It was a reminder that sometimes the most powerful thing you can do ***is refuse to let power be taken seriously*** — to show up in an inflatable frog suit and say: *we recognize this story, we remember this story, and we know how it ends.*

When the powerful choose spectacle — when they need you to see how large and impressive and terrifying they are — showing up in creative, stubborn, inflatable humility is not weakness.

It is one of the ***most*** subversive things you can do.

The crowd is also shouting *Hosanna*. But time and tradition have domesticated that word - making into something that sounds a lot like a hymn of triumph.

But that's not what it means. *Hosanna* is a cry. It is a plea. It means, ***deliver us!***

Save us! From poverty, war, the rich and powerful extracting whatever, and as much as they can...

Today, we still cry, save us!

From the constant drumbeat of war — the news cycle that normalizes catastrophe until we stop flinching.

From watching children cry on a screen, and knowing, somewhere in the back of your mind, that my tax dollars paid for those bombs.

From a politics built entirely on fear— where the goal is never to solve the problem, but to bully and intimidate you into obedient acquiescence.

From a world where housing has somehow become a luxury, where renters are one bad month from the street.

From a world where a cancer diagnosis comes with a GoFundMe attached, where people have to *crowdfund their survival*.

That crowd was not waving branches because everything was fine.

They were waving branches because everything was not fine — and they had found someone who not only saw it clearly, but refused to pretend otherwise.

Someone who walked toward Jerusalem instead of away from it. Someone who got on a donkey and rode straight at the empire... and dared it to blink.

Hosanna. Save us. We're ready. We're with you. Deliver us, Son of David!

What's interesting to me... is how this triumphal procession ended.

I am sure the "powers that be" took note.

Jesus did not confront Pilate directly. He did not set up a mock throne there in the Temple.

He looked around, then went back to Bethany, for dinner with his friends...

A theologian named Dong Hyeon Jeong writes about Palm Sunday as a revolutionary act. He says this:

"Revolutionary and subversive acts do not have to be grandiose or immediately altering. They can be small, seen but immediately unseen, loud and expected but bewilderingly unconventional. In that way, the powers that be cannot control, stop, or even anticipate the next revolutionary act."

I think about the clergy who traveled to a detention center in Minneapolis to deliver communion to people being held inside on Ash Wednesday. When authorities said no. The clergy went to court. And they won — the right to enter,

to offer the sacrament, to say to people behind those walls: ***we see you, and we will not look away.***

That is a donkey-on-a-colt moment. Unglamorous. Stubborn. Quiet. And it worked.

But here's what I want you to hear: **you do not have to go to court, or do something dramatic, to participate in this tradition.**

Adding something extra to your grocery list for the little free pantry — that is holy disruption. Showing up at school pickup with a whistle, making it known that this street has witnesses — that is holy disruption. Calling your representative, even if you think they already agree, or think they won't listen, even when it feels like shouting into the wind — that is holy disruption.

Planting a garden this spring and giving the produce away. Creating a piece of art that tells the unvarnished truth. Hosting a neighbor for dinner and actually listening to them tell their story. Visiting someone who is sick, or homebound, or forgotten — *because kindness costs nothing, and that is exactly what makes it so threatening to a system built entirely on transaction.*

Jesus knew what he was doing on that donkey.

He was showing his followers what resistance actually looks like — not always the grand gesture, but the *consistent, creative, embodied refusal* to pretend that domination is normal.

Today is a pivot from procession to Passion...

I want to say something about how many of us were taught to read Holy Week.

We were taught that the cross is about *Jesus and me*. A personal transaction. A private salvation. God and I have worked something out, and it is between us, and that is the whole story.

But the journey to the cross is not about *Jesus and me*.

It is about *Jesus and WE*.

Holy Week is not a private spiritual retreat. It is a communal march into the hardest week of the year, together. The palm branches only mean something when everyone throws them down.

The "hosanna" only rises when it comes from a crowd. The disciples' cloaks, spread out as a makeshift throne, are meaningful because *all of them did it* — ordinary people, with nothing to offer but what was on their backs.

Paul, as Marcus Borg reads him, puts it simply: "*Do not be conformed to the domination systems of this world — be transformed through the renewal of your mind.*"

That transformation is not only interior. It is not just a feeling, or a belief, or a private conviction you carry around quietly. It is public. It is *bodily*. It is feet on pavement. It is showing up. Not just one day, but day after day...

The journey towards Easter is not about passive waiting. It is about active, intentional, self-giving. It is about a God who does not observe from a distance but enters the city, gets on the donkey, and rides straight toward everything we are afraid of.

So here is your Palm Sunday question — and I am going to ask you to carry it with you this week, all the way through to Easter.

What will the good news inspire you to do?

It might be something grand. It might be something embarrassingly small. Jesus rode a *donkey* — I would encourage you not to underestimate small things...

Maybe it's a phone call you've been putting off. A pot of soup for someone who's struggling. A piece of art that tells a true thing. A conversation you've been

avoiding. A palm branch, waved in exactly the right place, at exactly the right moment.

"I have decided to follow Jesus" is not a feeling. It is a direction. It is a commitment to walk a certain way through the world — with our eyes open, our hands outstretched, and our feet willing to go where they're needed.

And it starts today.

Hosanna. Save us. Here we come.

As we make our way from Palm Sunday to Passion, will you join me in following, the creative, non-violent, self-giving way of Christ?

Let us sing!