



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
Sanford, North Carolina

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An Entrance to Remember
John 12:12-19

Some entrances have a way of making an impact, don't they?

Sports teams, from high school to college to the pros, often try to make impressive entrances to try to rally their fans and intimidate the opposing teams. Some of them are pretty memorable!

Often, when the president of the United States is about to enter a room, three trumpet flourishes sound out, and the song, "Hail to the Chief" is played. Sometimes that pomp can be very impressive and memorable.

And sometimes an entrance can be terrifying, as it was last Sunday morning for the residents and workers at Pine Lake Rehab in Carthage, or at the places in other states where there have been senseless multiple shootings recently.

A royal entrance

Our Scripture text this morning is about an entrance—specifically Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on that last Sunday before he would die on Friday.

Traditionally Christians have called this Sunday "Palm Sunday." Palm Sunday begins Holy Week as we remember the last week of Jesus' earthly life and his Passion and death on the cross, in anticipation of celebrating his resurrection on Easter morning.

John actually tells the story more sparsely than the other Gospels. But he does include some important details that the other Gospel writers don't.

For instance, the other Gospels don't tell us that it was palm branches that the people were carrying as they came out to meet Jesus.

He also emphasizes that there were people in the city who came out to meet Jesus in this celebration when they heard he was coming into Jerusalem. It wasn't just those coming in with Jesus who were celebrating.

And only John tells us emphatically that at first, his disciples didn't understand what this was all about, and that it was in fact only after he was glorified—that is, crucified and raised from the dead—that they realized the significance of what happened that day.

You see, those who came out to meet Jesus as he was entering Jerusalem were welcoming him as King! They wanted to make it *a royal entrance*!

So as Jesus came to Jerusalem, the people came out to welcome him with palms.

Charles Talbert tells us in his commentary on John's writings that this showed that they were welcoming him from the perspective of Jewish nationalism. Nearly two hundred years before in 164 B.C., when Judas Maccabeus had recaptured, cleansed, and rededicated the temple that had been desecrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his armies, the Jews brought palms to the

temple in celebration of the victory (2 Maccabees 10:7). Twenty-two years later in 142 B.C., when Judas' brother Simon conquered the citadel in Jerusalem and retook the city, the Jews carried palms of victory as they took possession of the city (1 Maccabees 13:51). Palms were about power against and victory over their enemies. The palms combined with their cry of "Hosanna," which means "Save us now"—a cry used to address kings in the ancient world—means that their welcome of Jesus was an appeal for him to accept the role of King as a national liberator!¹

Now Jesus is definitely King in John's Gospel.

For instance, in 1:49, Nathanael calls him "the King of Israel,"² and Jesus doesn't refuse or deny the title. And in 18:33-38, when Pilate questions Jesus about whether he is "the king of the Jews," Jesus replies, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Jesus then affirms Pilate's assertion that he is claiming to be a king. In chapters 18 and 19, after Pilate has tried to release Jesus, but the Jews have objected and rejected him in favor of Barabbas, who had participated in a rebellion, Pilate finally hands Jesus over to be crucified. In 19:19-22, the sign with the accusation against Jesus is placed on the cross over his head. It's written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, and reads: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." The chief priests protest that it should read that he "claimed to be king of the Jews," but Pilate responds, "What I have written, I have written."

So it's clear that Jesus is King. But it's also clear that he's *not* the kind of king they were looking for. In fact, in 6:15, after he had fed the five thousand with five small loaves and two small fish, Jesus perceived that the people wanted to take him by force and make him king. So he withdrew to the mountain alone to escape them.

Then in this text we're looking at this morning, the people welcome him to Jerusalem as "the King of Israel." All the indications are that they want him to be their nationalistic deliverer to set them free from Rome. They cry out for deliverance, but not from sin. They wave their palm branches in the victory they anticipate that he will bring.

But just as he has done all along, Jesus refuses to accept the people's definition of his role as King, and he demonstrates his own way of being King by the way he enters Jerusalem.³

Rather than letting them set the terms of his kingship by the way they were welcoming him, Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it to ride into Jerusalem. He was acting out Zechariah 9:9—

"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt."

He was showing that he was coming in peace, not war.

Again, Charles Talbert reminds us that in the ancient Mediterranean world, a monarch rode a horse in the time of war, but a donkey colt when he was on an errand of peace. So in an act of

¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 185.

² Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this sermon are from the *New International Version*.

³ George R. Basley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, Second Edition, Vol. 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 210.

prophetic symbolism, Jesus acts out the passage from Zechariah 9:9, a verse that comes from a larger passage that emphasizes how the coming King would proclaim peace to all the nations as they bow to his rule. So Jesus' action counteracts the crowd's welcoming him as a nationalistic deliverer-king.⁴ They were focused on Israel and being set free from Rome; Jesus was focused on the world and freeing all who would believe from sin and Satan!

Now at this point, John makes it clear that Jesus' disciples were confused. All along, they just didn't quite get it. As products of their time and backgrounds, they had the same kinds of expectations of the Messiah—that he would be a warrior-king who would set them free from Rome and rule on the earthly throne of his father David, restoring Israel to its former glories!

Can't you just imagine how their hearts must have stirred when they saw this crowd coming out to meet Jesus waving palm branches? They knew what that meant!

But then Jesus finds the donkey and rides in on it. And it all became so confusing to them. In fact, John tells us that *it was only after Jesus was glorified that His disciples understood the meaning of His entry into Jerusalem.*

Remember what Jesus' being glorified means in John—his crucifixion and resurrection! John makes that clear in the passage that follows our text, where in 12:32, Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”⁵ John adds, “He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die” (12:33).

But it was *after* he was glorified that they remembered. And remember they did! After all, this episode in Jesus' life and ministry is recorded as significant in all four Gospels, and has been remembered and celebrated by believers for nearly two thousand years!

Understanding the significance

What did the disciples remember? “That these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.”

In other words, they remembered that though the people wanted him to be one kind of king, he insisted on being the kind of King he came to be!

Have you ever had someone try to force you into being someone or something other than who you are, who God created you to be? Maybe they thought you should act totally different, or change your personality, or go about your work in a completely different way—all based on *their own expectations* of who you should be and what you should do.

Now it's one thing to pattern ourselves after a good role model. That can be helpful and positive. But to try to be someone or something that's foreign to who and what God has made us to be is something else all together. As my older minister cousin Eugene used to put it when he was still with us, “I have enough trouble trying to be me; why in the world would I want to try to be somebody else?!”

That's what those folks were trying to do to Jesus that day—make him king according to *their* understanding and expectations of what kind of king he should be.

But I wonder . . . How often do *we* try to do the same thing?

Do we try to push him into one area of our lives, when he insists on being Lord of all?

⁴ Talbert, 185-186. Also, Beasley-Murray, 210.

⁵ From the *English Standard Version*.

Do we try to use him as a pawn in our own little kingdoms of self-will, self-centeredness, and self-service when he is really King of kings?

Do we try to make him out to be our personal servant when only he is the true Master?

Do we think he came only for us and those like us—that somehow our religious or political party or nation or race is the only one he really recognizes or is concerned about—when in reality he came for the whole world?

Do we try to put him in a box, insisting that he can only be or act in the way *we* understand him, when in reality, he is the *sovereign Lord* of the universe, and sets the terms and rules according to his own will?

Do we try to press him into our own personal and national wars when he has come on a donkey rather than a stallion?

Oh, Revelation 19 shows him coming on the white horse when he returns, but that will be to deal with the enemies of God, not our little petty conflicts!

Remember—we're talking *the King* here! Not just any earthly king, but the King of the ages! The King of the Universe! The King of kings and Lord of lords!

Do you want to experience and understand what kind of King he really is? If you do, remember this: *we can understand Jesus as King only through the lens of His death and resurrection.*

Just a few days after he entered Jerusalem to the cries of praise from the welcoming crowd, another crowd (maybe some of the same people) watched as Jesus stood before Pilate at the judgment seat, beaten and battered and bruised, dressed in a purple robe and with a crown of thorns on his head.

Pilate had tried to let Jesus go free. But the Jews had kept shouting to him, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

So he has brought Jesus out to the judge's seat and told the Jews, "Here is your king." And they call for him to crucify Jesus.

Pilate says, "Shall I crucify your king?"

And they respond, "We have no king but Caesar" (19:12-16).

And that's how it is with us. We will either accept him as King on *his* terms, or we will have another king. He won't be King on anybody else's terms!

So what are his terms? What kind of King will he be?

Look to the cross, where he was lifted up.

Do you see him hanging there, dying for you and me?

He died to set us free from sin and Satan. He died so that we would not perish, but have eternal life—if we put our faith in him.

He died because he loves us, because he wants us to know him and his Father, and be in a right relationship with God, that we might have life to the full, both here and hereafter.

You see, *that's* the kind of King he is—the King who loves us in such a way that he lays down his life for us, and takes it up again in resurrection so that we might live with him forever! The King who draws us with bands of love into his abiding life-giving presence. The King who calls us to yield ourselves completely to him, knowing that he desires only what is best for us.

Have you welcomed him into your life?

When you do, it will be *an entrance to remember!*

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