

“Entrances Matter”

OT: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

NT: Mark 11:1-11

**Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

An article with Psychology Today says, “Psychologists say most people form impressions of others within the first four minutes of meeting them, and 80 percent of those first impressions are based on nonverbal behavior. Making a dignified entrance at an event might just be more important than the conversations you have later.

When you make your entrance, the best way to draw attention to yourself in a tasteful way is being attractive, charming, witty, and memorable, says Liz Scofield, an etiquette teacher at Lehigh University. To turn heads and leave good impressions, pay attention to:

Your walk. As you enter, walk with confidence, but not arrogance. Keep your head up, your shoulders back and down, and smile. No swaggering!

Your clothes. Your clothes should be stunning without being over the top — fashionable without revealing too much skin.

Your placement. When you first pass through the door, pause, step to the right, and survey the crowd. People watch the front door, so you’ll be in plain view.

Your sociability. Do not make a beeline for safety nets such as the bar, food, or people you already know. Instead, move from group to group and introduce yourself. If you are confident and friendly, people will naturally be attracted to you.”

Now, I am sure Scofield’s perspective here is valid if we want to impress the crowd when we enter a room. I can imagine for many of us, that is not our goal or anywhere close to the forefront of our minds when we get ready to go someplace. Maybe not all of us, but for many of us, we just assume no one notice and we can simply slide in and slide out. It may depend on the event as well.

Regardless, as I read Scofield’s suggestions for a memorable entrance, I wondered how Scofield would rate Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem based on these criteria. Here is what we know. Jesus was and is memorable. He had this way about him that made people turn heads and know when he was around. People flocked to where he was when they received word of his coming. How did Jesus do it? Let’s look at the criteria. Was it his walk? Was he wearing anything special? Did he know just where to stand? On these three, I think Scofield would give Jesus a low rating. However, I think for sociability, Jesus would have been rated off the charts, enough maybe to suggest the other three criteria where not all that important at all. Think

about all the stories we are told of Jesus. He would have noticed everyone and talked with everyone he could. Jesus was confident and friendly, and it was people, not food or drink, that Jesus was most passionate about.

Another way we could consider the importance of entrances is literarily or in writing. When we are reading a story and not witnessing something for ourselves, we place a certain level of trust in the way in which the author tells a story and introduces characters.

An article talking about writing style and ways to introduce characters says, “A grand entrance signals to the reader that this is a character they should pay attention to.... Great storytelling is built on the foundation of sensory details. When you provide visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory (taste) or actions, the reader becomes immersed in the story as if they were actually present. You can use sensory details to create a zoom, a pan or a scan.

A zoom focuses on tiny details; for example, a face fills the entire imagery, with minute details about each feature. The zoom can travel: you may start by describing in detail the character’s shoes and then travel upward to the face. Or start with any significant detail and then pull back to see the whole. For a surgeon, perhaps describe her clever hands and then travel to her scrubs and finally to her face.

At the other extreme, a panorama pulls back to a bird’s eye view of an entire village. A scan is a method of handling a crowd scene by using specific details to represent a general sense of the mass. For example, a scan might do a mini-zoom in on an old man stumbling along with a cane, then quickly move to an infant taking tottering steps, and then contrast those with a strong young man pushing everyone aside. The series of mini-zooms gives a flavor of the crowd, making it more specific and thus more interesting.

Also, remember that story openings work best when they are focused on a scene. Long-winded descriptions might have worked a hundred years ago, but are less successful for today’s impatient audience. Instead, stories succeed when they start with a character who wants something and faces obstacles to their desires.”

Let’s think back to Mark’s version of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. How did he do? He nailed it. Mark is an action-packed writer. He gets right to the point while providing all the right elements to lure you in. Matthew, Luke, and John all share the story of Jesus’ entry as well, but not with the same attention and literary skill as Mark. Mark doesn’t just highlight Jesus, he paints a picture of the crowd in relationship with Jesus. Jesus is illumined because the actions of the crowd give him praise and honor. Back and forth, Mark delivers a sense of anticipation and true triumph. The message we receive from Mark’s story is deeper than the events taking place: more than a man riding on a donkey and palm branches lining the street.

In reading the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, even if we hadn't known anything about Jesus before, the way Jesus entered tells us something important is about to go down. Actually, it is the beginning of a story that tells us someone very important is about to go down. His entry invites us into the streets of Jerusalem to experience the sights and smells and sounds.

Fortunately, we do know something about Jesus before his entry. As a matter of fact, from our birds eye view today, over 2000 years later we also know what is coming. We are challenged each year, as we recall the events of Holy Week, to take each event one at a time, and not rush ahead. To jump directly to the cross leaves out important symbolism and life lessons. To jump directly to Easter, without taking the time to consider the entry, last supper, trial, and death dilutes in a way the power of Christ's victory over death.

A few good take-aways about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem will help set the page for all that is coming throughout the week.

1. If we back up a few days and weeks in the chronology of Jesus' story, we find a story of Jesus having dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, at Lazarus' house. The significance of this dinner is that it took place after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. And we learn from that story that the crowds heading to Passover in Jerusalem were following Jesus because they had heard about Lazarus coming back to life!

Passover was a festival all Jews attended in Jerusalem, some traveling for days to attend. Jesus had a way of making a scene with big crowds and so it is not presumptuous to think one of the primary reasons the crowds follow Jesus into Jerusalem was because they've either heard or seen him raise Lazarus from the dead! This event was one of the reasons for the energy of the crowd that followed Jesus into Jerusalem. I don't know about you all, but I think I would have had all eyes on the one who could raise people from the dead too.

2. It wasn't really a 'triumphal' entry. We call Jesus' entry, 'triumphal', and rightly so because He is our King. But to the people of that day Jesus' entrance looked sad, actually.

In Jerusalem many would have seen a Roman Triumph. This was an elaborate celebration of a war hero returning from his victory. A Roman Triumph was amazing. Beautiful horses, golden chariots, people dancing and singing, and people shouting "man of triumph!" as the hero rode through the streets. A triumphal entry, to the people of this day, was a political and military celebration.

Instead, Jesus was a man, a wanted man I might add, riding on a donkey with a bunch of "poor" folks waving palm branches for him. Jesus' entry was different.

Why didn't Jesus ride a warhorse? Mark Boda explains: "In the ancient Middle Eastern world, leaders rode horses if they rode to war, but donkeys if they came in peace. First Kings 1:33 mentions Solomon riding a donkey on the day he was recognized as the new king of Israel. Other instances of leaders riding donkeys are found in Judges and 2 Samuel. The mention of a donkey in Zechariah 9:9-10 fits the description of a king who would be "righteous and having salvation, gentle." Rather than riding to conquer, this king would enter in peace. Zechariah 9:10 highlights this peace: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."

We are to note the many details symbolic of peace in this prophecy:

"Take away the chariots": an end to the main vehicle of war.

"Take away... the war-horses": no need for horses used in war.

"The battle bow will be broken": no need for bows or arrows for fighting.

"He will proclaim peace to the nations": His message will be one of reconciliation.

"His rule shall be from sea to sea": the King will control extended territory with no enemies of concern.

Jesus fulfills this prediction of Zechariah. Worldwide peace proclaimed by this humble King will be a fulfillment of the angels' song in Luke 2:14:

"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Jesus' entry means peace is here. If you don't know what peace looks like or feel it in your life, look to Jesus and you will know it through your faith in him. Jesus is indeed coming into Jerusalem but he's not coming in to conquer the city. He's coming as a humble king, prepared to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus rides a donkey into the city to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and be the King that saves the lives of people like you and me.

Every Jew would have been very familiar with Zechariah's messianic prophecy. That's why the crowds hailed Jesus as their king shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus is the true Davidic Messiah and king.

Would just anyone else have thought of doing what Jesus did? No. Jesus knew what was needed to affirm his role for the people of God. Jesus came to fulfill the prophecy.

3. This isn't about Jesus being a King. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem isn't a story of Jesus being the King. If you take a minute to stop and think about that, Jesus isn't even presenting himself as royalty. He looked rather peasant-ish.

The story of Jesus' triumphal entry is about Jesus being a different kind of king. Jesus wasn't interested in taking over Jerusalem or Rome, like the crowds wanted him to. That was a hope and desire placed on God by the people because they didn't know of any other way to do it but through war and battle. At best, I think they hoped for a warrior that would come fight the same earthly battle they were fighting and that once the battle was complete, he would go away. That way was too small for Jesus.

Jesus wasn't even interested in showing his power at this moment. After all the divine miracles he had shown, don't we believe he could have called down 1,000's of angels in the blink of an eye to take care of his enemies. But he didn't.

The story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem teaches us that the King of Glory humbled himself and became a servant King so that we might live with Him forever. Jesus wasn't interested or caught up in taking over Jerusalem so that hundreds and thousands would bow at his feet and worship the crown. What Jesus was focused on was taking over the hearts of humanity so that we could have a renewed relationship with God forever. What Jesus cared about was walking with the people in love and care, showing them the way and will of God over and beyond the way and will of humanity. And the cost of doing what Jesus did the way he did it is what we learn about as the events unfold the rest of the week. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is only the beginning of the storyline, but make no mistake, it is a powerful introduction of who Jesus is and a memorable entrance.

Remember what the psalmist said, "God's steadfast love endures forever." Let the people say, "God's steadfast love endures forever." When things get crazy in the coming week... at home, at work... take a deep breath and say, "God's steadfast love endures forever." When things have gone well, and you have finished a project... say "God's steadfast love endures forever." When you wake up in the morning and before you lay down to sleep at night... say "God's steadfast love endures forever." When you are tempted to react to a situation abruptly with criticism or anger or judgement toward another, or when you receive news of something happening that you can't begin to swallow... say "God's steadfast love endures forever."

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!

Let all God's people say... Amen.

## Invitation to Holy Week Remembrance:

The story of the triumphal entry is one of contrasts, and those contrasts contain applications. It is the story of the King who came as a lowly servant on a donkey, not a prancing steed, not in royal robes, but on the clothes of the poor and humble. Jesus Christ comes not to conquer by force as earthly kings but by love, grace, mercy, and His own sacrifice for His people. His is not a kingdom of armies and splendor but of lowliness and servanthood. He conquers not nations but hearts and minds. His message is one of peace with God, not of temporal peace. When we are in relationship with Jesus, His peace and love reign with us. As His followers, we are equipped and empowered to exhibit those same qualities, and when we do, the world sees the true King living and reigning in triumph through us.

Jesus' triumphal journey teaches us that after all the sacrifices offered for sin, we can enter the rest of faith because of His final sacrifice (Hebrews 10:12). Because Jesus entered Jerusalem to face what he was to face... we are liberated, we are freed... to live without being bound to sin- we are invited to live a fuller life in Christ.

The story from palm to passion and ultimately to victory, is in motion and I pray you will be intentional about following along in the story throughout this week. Maundy Thursday we will be gathering at 5:30 pm in the rear parking lot to actively recall Jesus gathering the disciples together in the Upper Room, kneeling at their feet, and offering them the bread of life and cup of salvation. We will be sharing a tasting of a traditional Seder Feast as a part of our remembrance. All are invited and no reservations are necessary. On Friday, we invite you into a time of personal reflection using a time lapse video of interpretative art by artist Tyler Hutchison. You will be able to access that video on our website, as well as Facebook or Youtube. Each of these worship opportunities, beginning with this service now, will be left open-ended, to allow for one to build on the next. As we close each of these services, we invite you to depart in reflection and anticipation of what God will do next.

Next Sunday, the stone will be rolled away and we will celebrate Easter. At 7 am in the columbarium we will have our Sunrise service. At 10:30 am, the Chancel Choir with brass and timpani will share Easter lessons and carols on the radio and live video streaming. At 4 pm, we will gather at the cross in the front circle for a service of singing, shouting, and sharing the good news. Throughout the day, you are invited to come bring fresh flowers to flower the cross.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, blessed in the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!