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Matthew 21:1-9 The Parade: Risking Reputation  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 21:1-9 Common English Bible

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them." He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, Say to Daughter Zion, "Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey's offspring." The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them. Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

I love a good parade, don't you? Everyone is smiling and having fun. I remember one of my first years at the Pride Parade in Oak Lawn. I was there with Oak Lawn UMC and our float just happened to be right in front of the float for one of the stores in Oak Lawn called Skivvies that sells men's underwear. I had to make sure I only looked straight ahead!

Just like a parade we would go to today, the streets were lined with people. Everyone is in town for a Passover celebration remembering the exodus from Egypt and being saved from slavery. Then Jesus tells two of his followers to get him some transportation. It would be like a popular leader sending two members of the entourage into downtown with instructions to find a Lexus sedan and a sports car. If anyone asks what are you doing with those cars just say the Lord needs them. That'll be fine. Not likely! The next call would be 911 to report two stolen cars.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew's Gospel wants us to know that Jesus isn't worried about transportation, this whole thing with the donkey is because of prophecies in Zechariah 9:9. That verse in Zechariah talks about the coming king as humble, but not in the sense of lowly. Humble in the sense of being able to listen to others, to share resources, to prioritize community rather than authority, to serve rather than to be served.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is depicted as a king who does not lord it over others, but who takes his place with those who are suffering.

So, the disciples get a donkey and a colt and Jesus appears to be riding both of them. It sounds like a circus parade! Or more likely, it is poetic parallelism, a popular form of Hebrew poetry where the second line enhances the first. It is like the writer is saying, "Does Jesus fulfill prophecy? You bet he does!"<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is so interesting to me because the stories are a little bit different in the different Gospels. No one Gospel tells the entire story; no one Gospel could. Each gives us different messages, and different images. Matthew's Gospel wants to show the relationship between Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel but also between Jesus and King David and Jesus and Moses.

Jesus comes into the city with shouts of acclaim. Hosanna, which means save us! They were saying he was the Messiah, the promised one who had come to save them. There have been parades like that in our time in places like Hong Kong, Cape Town, Birmingham, Washington D.C., and Tariq Square in Egypt. People come together and they say save us. We all want to be saved, from pain, from despair, from loneliness, from poverty, from oppression. We want God to save us but we also realize that we have to work to help each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Levine, Amy-Jill. Entering the Passion of Jesus. Kindle page 25.

<sup>2</sup> Levine, Amy-Jill. Entering the Passion of Jesus. Kindle page 28.

<sup>3</sup> Levine, Amy-Jill. Entering the Passion of Jesus. Kindle page 29.

This Lent we are going to be looking at the events that took place during the last week of Jesus life so that we might picture ourselves in the story. I want to invite you to look at the picture on the cover of your bulletin. Do you see yourself in the picture? Where are you in the parade? Are you in the parade shouting “Hosanna!” or are you on the sidelines, afraid to take part? Are you up front ready for Jesus to perform a display of power? Are you on the balcony ready to make a quick exit in case there is trouble? Maybe a little distance is fine with you because you don’t want to get too close to Jesus. Maybe you aren’t in the picture at all because you don’t want to be known as a protestor, a rebel rouser, so you are hiding out at home.

There were powerful people in Jerusalem who wouldn’t like Jesus riding into town to cheers of save us. It was risky for Jesus but it was also risky for people to be seen cheering for Jesus like that. Maybe the authorities would think the crowds needed a strong reminder who the real leaders were.

Bishop Karen Oliveto, the first openly gay Bishop in the United Methodist Church said, “To follow Jesus entails risk. If I’m not risking something – my status, my livelihood, even my freedom – I’m probably not following Jesus as closely as I should.”<sup>4</sup> After the massacre at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando June 12, 2016, Karen said that she had to run for Bishop. She had been asked before but she said that she didn’t want to harm the church, herself or her wife. She said fear was a factor. When she woke up the morning after the mass shooting at Pulse, she knew she had to run. She said it was the right thing at the right time.<sup>5</sup> She ran and she won.

Lent is a time for us to examine our lives. As we picture ourselves in the story of Jesus, may we ask what risk would we have taken that day? Is there a time when we would dare to cheer on Jesus out loud, even if it meant others might think we look silly? It is easy for us to cheer on Jesus when life is going well, but when life is hard what do we do? Can we take the risk like Bishop Oliveto did?

I love Kate Bowler. She is a professor at Duke Divinity School who was diagnosed with incurable stage four cancer at age 35. She said this week that Lent is the time of year when the church is for the losing team. Forty days when we stand with the sad people and the sick and the people who can’t get it together. Lent says take courage, we are here to face down the darkness and it is our job to learn how to do it together.

In our lives we will encounter pain. It is inevitable. We can’t protect one another from the pain of the world, but we can show each other that there is truth and beauty in the midst of it. Kate Bowler said that Christianity saved her because it reminded her that in the midst of the crushing brokenness, there is something else there, the undeniable, overwhelming love of God. Joy persists and we are invited to soak it in.

We are called to do the work because suffering should never be done alone. So, call your friend who needs you. Be silent and give a hug or hold a hand. God is always bringing beauty from the ashes. The best part of us is the new thing that God is always doing, and when we end, God begins.<sup>6</sup> Thanks be to God, Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10221739303453879&set=a.1114124815376&type=3&theater>

<sup>5</sup> [https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/installation-of-openly-gay-bishop-could-add-to-schism-in/article\\_d7f4c75e-5a25-5fc8-a373-9bc22ded7e6a.html](https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/installation-of-openly-gay-bishop-could-add-to-schism-in/article_d7f4c75e-5a25-5fc8-a373-9bc22ded7e6a.html)

<sup>6</sup> <http://time.com/5118044/kate-bowler-interview-cancer-faith/>