

Unexpected Arrival (Palm Sunday)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 March 2026

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to be back with you this morning. So I have a touch of a cold, so don't take it personally if I elbow bump you or keep a little distance.

You don't want it, and I don't want to give it to you. So there you go. Just a couple of reminders. Len mentioned them already, but I was talking to somebody this morning and I said, are you coming to the Good Friday service? And they said, when is it?

And I said, I said, I said, we're actually moving it to Thursday this year. It's something new we're going to try.

And I said, it is on, good. And the person said, yes, got it. So all four Gospels give us varying accounts of the event that we refer to as the triumphal entry.

And I want us to hear two of them this morning, Mark 11, 1 to 11, and John 12, 12 to 19. So we're going to start with Mark. So you see it there. Go ahead and look it up.

[1 : 1 3] There's some audience participation coming up, and I'm going to make it real clear. So Mark 11, 1 to 11.

Here you go, folks.

What did they shout? You can do better than that. Next. People are leading ahead. I gotcha.

So now let's hear this account from John 12, 12 to 19, and go ahead and flip there.

The next day, the great crowd had come for the festival, heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna!

[3 : 1 2] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel. Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written, Do not be afraid, daughter Zion.

See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt. At first, his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Now the crowd that was with him, when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

So the Pharisees said to one another, See, this is getting nowhere. Look at how the whole world has gone after him. The events that we've been reminded about, and we're going to be focusing on today, Palm Sunday, and our sermon is titled, Unexpected Arrival.

We're really going to focus in on Mark 11, 1 to 11, the account we just heard as our anchor passage this morning. And so what we can recognize there is that in Mark, from chapter 11 on, the events of Mark's gospel take place near Jerusalem.

[4 : 3 4] And they progress from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his crucifixion. And then they culminate in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

So I don't know how often we really reflect on the time frame here. Have you ever thought about it? Maybe you have, maybe you haven't. These events, my friends, occurred in the span of eight days. It's a time that Christians refer to, and you heard me mention it a little bit earlier, as Holy Week. So what about Palm Sunday? Well, the first day of Holy Week is often remembered and referred to as Palm Sunday.

And that's where we find ourselves right here today. Palm Sunday is the day that begins the week before Easter in the Christian church. And it ends this coming Friday, ironically, we're having a service then, on Good Friday.

So it's the day when Jesus made his triumphal entry into the city. So we heard just a moment ago in John's account that his inner circle didn't completely understand the significance of this entrance into Jerusalem.

[5 : 56] And when I read that passage earlier this week, again, I was thinking they didn't get it. Well, of course, it's the apostles. They don't get things all the time.

But that's the reality, right? We heard in that account that they didn't completely get it. They didn't completely understand the significance. And it really was an unexpected arrival in so many ways. So let's start this morning by considering the narrative, this written account of events that actually happened. So first, in the lead up, we learn from Mark 11, verse 1, that Jesus and his disciples are getting close to Jerusalem.

And they're arriving by way of Bethany and Bethphage. And we heard those mentioned in the passage. And these are two small villages that are quite near the Mount of Olives, between Jericho and Jerusalem, to give you some geographical context.

That we learn from Mark 1, 1 to 3, that Jesus arranges for two of his disciples, two of the apostles at that point, to go and get a colt.

[7 : 07] Specifically one that no one has ridden yet. And that's clear in the text. And then we know, we also learn, that Jesus knows the owner will agree to him using this animal.

How does Jesus know that? Well, he's Jesus, for one. But Mark isn't clear in the account whether Jesus knowing this is foreknowledge or a previous arrangement that was made.

And really, ultimately, it's not important because Mark doesn't focus on it, right? So it's not critical information there. Jesus knew it played out.

So Mark 11, 4 to 6, tells us then how the colt is found and secured. And the disciples are questioned about why they're untying the animal. No kidding.

This belonged to someone. Seemed like stealing, right? Probably. But as soon as Jesus' name is mentioned, we hear in the account, they let them take the colt away.

[8 : 11] Just the mention of Jesus' name. So whether the owner of this colt was a follower of Jesus or not. But Jesus' name carried weight in that situation.

And the disciples get this colt, just as Jesus predicted. So then the unexpected arrival continues to play out. Now we hear, we begin to close in on the triumphal entry, that actual big event that we know.

Mark 11, verse 7, tells us that the colt is brought to Jesus. And then cloaks are placed on the animals' backs just as, and then Jesus climbs aboard, right?

It's interesting that Matthew's account of the colt actually mentions the donkey and her colt were brought to Jesus. So that's a little bit different account, right?

A different perspective. Maybe it was so the mother could comfort her baby? We don't know. And certainly in lots of the depictions we see, whether it's in a video or artist renderings or whatever, it's Jesus and the colt, right?

[9 : 18] That's it. There's no mother hanging around going, you be kind to my baby. So Mark 11, verse 8, tells us that many people spread their cloaks on the road.

And then others spread out branches that they had cut. Why did they do these things? Right? We talk about Palm Sunday. We wave palm branches.

That's part of the imagery for us. But why do we do that? Why is that important? Well, some theologians suggest it may be connected to a passage in 2 Kings.

So you can flip there if you want, and I'll read it for us. 2 Kings 9, 12, and 13. 2 Kings 9, 12, and 13, which says, So in that account in 2 Kings, we recognize a crowned, recognized ruler, has cloaks laid out on the ground before him as a symbol of respect, symbol of submission.

We don't know for sure. And we can't confirm that connection for sure, right? I found a reference to that connection as a possibility, but then not a lot of, yeah, absolutely.

[10 : 50] Yeah, absolutely. This old guy says this. This younger guy says this. It's all connected, right? I can't confirm that for sure. But there's certainly a reverence and respect on display there as people are preparing the way for this unexpected arrival.

John's account specifically then, you heard it probably, mentions palm branches in John 12, verse 13, right? Mark mentions branches that were cut, and then John's account says palm branches, hence the palm branches.

So then we've also heard this morning that people shouted their praises to Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on the cold that day. They shouted, Hosanna, which is a Hebrew-derived term that means save us, we pray, or please deliver us.

So I think that term, Hosanna, maybe this is true for you, maybe not. I think it's often misunderstood or only partly understood, just as this shout of praise, right?

And that makes sense because that was the context, right? Jesus was entering, they were declaring him king and recognizing him as the Messiah, and so they said Hosanna.

[12:13] Hosanna. So we often use that word to declare praise, especially on Palm Sunday, because we do recognize Jesus as Messiah.

But it's a more complete understanding, it also includes an urgent plea for salvation, for deliverance. So the people are declaring Hosanna as praise, but also saying, please help us, please deliver us.

Psalms 118, verse 25 says, Lord, save us. Lord, grant us success. Hosanna. The crowds also shout, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Well, as David writes in Psalm 118, verse 26, hear this. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, David says. From the house of the Lord, we bless you.

And so amid these shouts of praise and enthusiastic greeting, Jesus enters Jerusalem, as we learn in Mark 11, verse 11.

[13:26] So once he's inside the city, Jesus goes straight to the temple, checks things out, looks around. But then we hear in that account that by the time he arrives there, it's late in the day, so he doesn't stay.

So at that point, we learn in Mark 11, verse 11, that Jesus returns to Bethany with the 12. Who are the 12? The apostles, right?

I think I've talked about this many times over the years, but I think sometimes we get confused when Scripture refers to that initial group as disciples, because then we're all disciples, right?

So a follower of Jesus, a student of Jesus is a disciple. So interchangeably, you can talk about the apostles because they're also disciples, but we are not apostles.

Make sense? So we learn in Mark 11, 11, that Jesus returns to Bethany. And as we've been reminded, Bethany is a biblical village that's located on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives.

[14:33] It's less than two miles east of Jerusalem, approximately. And Bethany was a frequent resting place for Jesus. It served as a quiet and hospitable home base for him, a place that was familiar, that was near Jerusalem's hustle and bustle, close and convenient, but removed enough to not be too close.

Bethany, you probably are also notable because it's where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. It's possible that's where Jesus stayed for at least part of this week leading up to his crucifixion.

So with that brief look at the detailed events of the day, let's consider some observations and takeaways that we can get. First, the fulfillment of prophecy.

So Zechariah 9, verse 9, I put it on the slide this time. It was written more than 500 years before Jesus.

That's a long time. And it says, you can see it on the screen. Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion. Shout, daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

[16:00] And Matthew 21, verses 4 and 5 make it clear that Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, a colt, was a fulfillment of that prophecy from Zechariah.

I don't know that we often make that connection, but there you have it. So the other thing that these events that we've been talking about this morning show us is the nature of the kingdom of God.

So the events surrounding this unexpected arrival, they also reflected a sense of messianic anticipation from the people.

The people were expecting and waiting for a Messiah. Mark 11, verse 10 says, Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.

John's accounts of the events reflect even more of a sense of this prophecy being fulfilled. And God's promised king, who's been sent in his name, is Jesus.

[17:06] So immediately after the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, I always like to have this happen, and then this happen, and then this happen. So you get a sense of the flow of all the events.

So this was immediately after this miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. John 6, verse 15 tells us that Jesus recognized that the people wanted to force him to be the king they wanted.

The kind of king they wanted. But he refused. You can see that in John 6, verse 15. He refused and he withdrew.

So many people were looking for the Messiah to be a literal king. I think all of us recognize that. Or, at the very least, a powerful warrior who would ride into Jerusalem on a big, majestic war horse. Someone who would come and quite literally deliver them from Roman oppression. I almost said Russian oppression. Roman oppression. But Jesus made it clear, this is one of the many times, that his kingdom was not a worldly kingdom.

[18:19] He made it clear, folks, don't expect that because I'm not that. I'm this. His kingdom was a spiritual one and he made that clear many, many times.

Luke 17, verses 20 and 21 says, Jesus declared his kingdom clearly to the Pharisees.

When Jesus is taken before Pilate after Judas betrays him to the Romans, to the Jewish religious leaders, we read in John 18, verse 36, Jesus declaring his kingdom again.

Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. Peter tried.

But now my kingdom is from another place. Right? This is not the kingdom you expect. Jesus declared his kingdom clearly to Pilate.

[19:44] The Apostle Paul also makes this unique kingdom perspective clear in Romans 14, verse 17, where he writes, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 50, Paul says, I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Paul made it clear that the coming kingdom of Jesus was spiritual and not physical. See the common theme there? How have you personally viewed the selection of a donkey's colt versus a powerful white stallion?

Wasn't as if Jesus was trying to be environmentally conscious or fiscally responsible. We might choose a subcompact when we go to rent a car versus an SUV.

Jesus didn't wind up getting whatever form of transportation happened to be available. Have you ever thought of it that way? Well, a colt, I guess that's all they had left.

[21:10] Friends, the colt was chosen with care and intention. And it was a key element in this unexpected arrival.

Jesus' selection of the colt indicated the spiritual nature of this kingdom. A kingdom that would defy all expectations.

And I believe it still does. Normally, kings would ride on a horse. Symbols of war and power and wealth and influence.

But the donkey symbolized peace. Meekness. The essential nature and message of Jesus' mission. And his eternal kingdom. How exciting it must have been on that day. The anticipation fulfilled.

[22:08] The joy at the arrival. The praise of Christ has echoed in heaven and eternity since his resurrection and ascension.

Have you ever thought about the fact that we have an awesome privilege? I don't care how many or few of us there are in a given place. We have an awesome privilege of joining in that praise right here together every Sunday morning.

An unexpected arrival happened on that first Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem. It defied many of the assumptions that have been made about the Messiah.

What a triumphal entry it will be when he returns. And also, I believe, an unexpected arrival in many ways as well.

We have no idea, as much as we might try, when or even how Jesus will return. Certainly not with the kind of pinpoint accuracy that some of us might want.

[23:21] The return of the king will be very different the next time. When he arrives, not to offer himself as the only payment for sin, as he did when he first revealed himself.

But to then offer eternal salvation for those who believe. 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 6-10 says, God is just.

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. And give relief to you who are troubled. And to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.

And from the glory of his might. On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people. And to be marveled at among those who have believed.

[24 : 38] Jesus' return will be a day of salvation for those who eagerly await him. And for others who have chosen to reject God.

That will be a day of condemnation or even destruction. As we await his triumphal re-entry at the last day.

Let's faithfully serve him. Let's reflect this week on all that he has done for us. All that he has done for you.

And how we can share that good news with everyone we meet. Amen. Amen. Amen.