

Sunday 29th March 2026 - Journey To Jerusalem: Palm Sunday

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Date: 29 March 2026

Preacher: Laura Edwards

[0:00] So this morning is Palm Sunday and the last in our series of talks on Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden.

Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, Why are you doing this? Say, The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly. They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, What are you doing untying that colt? They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

[1:57] Hosanna in the highest heaven! Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

So it's a scene that most of us will be very familiar with, a scene of expectation, celebration, but also as we'll explore real tension.

Excitement was building for the Jewish festival of Passover, the biggest of all Jewish festivals, when people from all over the country would gather in Jerusalem to remember and celebrate the way in which God had rescued their ancestors from Egyptian slavery.

Passover was all about freedom. And yet now, the Jewish people once again found themselves being oppressed, living under the control of the Roman Empire.

And so you can imagine how Passover had this political edge to it, a people celebrating their liberation in the past, but now longing for freedom in the present. Jesus would have been fully aware of this tension.

[3:20] And so it's interesting to see what he does. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he sends two of his disciples ahead with specific instructions that they will find a colt, tied and unridden, and should bring it to him.

This was a conscious, deliberate act, not an accidental or even miraculous one. It is clear when Jesus begins to ride instead of walk that something important is about to happen.

You see, the donkey riding entry into Jerusalem references a number of Old Testament prophecies, particularly Zechariah 9, which describes the kind of person, the Messiah, this long-expected leader of the people would be.

And Zechariah 9 says, Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you! Triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Triumphant and victorious, yes, but also humble, which is a pretty unique combination, especially when compared with the way in which the Roman leaders would present themselves.

[4:45] For example, it would have been widely known that Roman generals returning to Rome would do so on a white war horse, surrounded by chariots and weapons, to show their triumph and demonstrate what a marvellous general they were.

It was a procession designed to convey power, but also instill fear in all those watching. Step out of line, and we have the power to crush you.

Whereas for Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, a slow, plodding, gentle animal, one you could even pat on the way through, well, the contrast is clear, that it's Jesus' way of challenging and subverting the whole idea of power and fear.

All of this suggests that Jesus' deliberate mounting of a donkey was enough of a clue to suggest that although Jesus was indeed the longed-for king-like figure, he'd come to offer redemption in an altogether different way.

And there are other clues in the way Jesus processes into Jerusalem too. For example, we know from historians that while Jesus is processing from the east of the city, later that same day, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, along with the Roman military, would be processing into the city from the west.

[6:09] Pilate and his men would do this for all major pilgrimage festivals. The city would be full to bursting of Jews celebrating their history, full of zeal.

And the Roman authorities wanted to make sure their presence was felt. On the west side, there was Pilate, with power, prestige, political and military authority.

And on the east, Jesus with an entirely radical form of power. And I love how the author, Nick Page, summarises this. He says, This was the choice that Jesus presented to the people that day, to the leaders of the temple, to the scribes and the lawmakers and the temple police, to the pilgrims in their tents and the poor in their tenements, and to everyone since.

Which king are you going to choose? The rule of Rome or the kingdom of God? That was the challenge Jesus presented to the people of his day.

And I'd say it still remains a challenge for us today too. Whose ways will we follow? The ways of our culture and system, which so often shouts about the need to accumulate wealth, power and prestige, even if it means stepping on other people to get there.

[7:51] Or do we follow the ways of Jesus, in which compassion, kindness, generosity, humility and service are championed? That's what this coming Holy Week is all about.

An opportunity for us to consider afresh what it means to truly follow Jesus and the difference it makes to our everyday lives.

For the people in the crowds on that first Palm Sunday, with all the excitement and hope for freedom that Passover contained, it wouldn't be surprising if many of them missed the point of the humble way in which Jesus came into town.

They wanted freedom and they wanted saving from the Romans. They shout Hosanna, which means God save us.

And maybe many of them would have been expecting Jesus to storm into the temple and start a revolution. But what does he do? Well, in Mark, we told this.

[8:59] Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked round at everything. But since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

So Jesus rides into Jerusalem, enters the temple. At first glance, this verse seems surprisingly uneventful.

After the great triumphant entry, Jesus simply looks around and then leaves. He does not teach or pray, doesn't heal or debate, and does not cause a scene of any kind.

This quiet moment can seem puzzling. He does nothing, says nothing. He just returns, leaves and returns to Bethany. It sounds like he's retreating, getting out of town.

So what is all that about? Did Jesus have somewhere else he needed to be? What had he seen?

This is such a strange and anti-climatic ending to the triumphal entry.

[10:15] It makes me think there has to be something significant here. As is often the case with the Bible, digging into the meaning of the

original language in which a story was written helps us to shed light on what might be going on.

For example, we're told in English that Jesus looked around. The original Greek word that's used is periblipso. The verb means more than a quick glance.

It means a deliberate, thoughtful, inspecting look. It means to look around carefully, survey or examine.

It suggests that Jesus was inspecting everything intentionally, not casually observing. This was not random curiosity. It was authoritative assessment.

And in the New Testament, this word is used mostly in Mark. Usually when Jesus looks around in judgment, compassion or discernment, every time he looks around, something significant follows.

[11:29] And what does Jesus look at? Well, we're told he looks around at everything. This everything is a translation of the Greek word, panta.

It's a bit easier to say that one. Which means all things. Jesus looked around at everything. Not just the people, not just the outer courts, but every part of the temple complex.

The scope of his inspection was total. So what would he have seen? Well, the money changers, ripping off poor pilgrims.

The animal sellers, again, charging higher than usual, festival prices. The priests and the Levites, some of whom would have gloried in their status.

The temple structure and where people were allowed to go or not go. Splitting areas between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, clean and so-called unclean people.

[12:36] The holy place and its function. Out of bounds, except to the select few. And the spiritual condition of the whole system.

Was it bringing people closer to God or further away? He saw not only what was happening physically, but also at the heart of worship, whether the temple still honoured God.

The temple authorities had put in place so many rules and laws, many of which were designed to ensure that only the purest of people were allowed to worship God.

And what's more, these rules were often tied up with money so that only those who were rich could truly satisfy the religious standards the authorities demanded. Purity was therefore used as control.

It was virtually impossible for the poor people to achieve righteousness. So what would Jesus have made of all this? Well, it's worth us noting that Jesus had been staying in Bethany with his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who he had recently raised from the dead.

[13:51] And what's interesting is that Bethany is thought to have been a leper colony at the time of Jesus, which means that maybe even his friends had been healed of this affliction by Jesus himself.

We don't know for sure, but given the social stigma that came with leprosy, we know that they would have been relatively poor and parts of the temple would not have been very accessible to them.

Would Lazarus have even been able to attend given the controversy of his resurrection? Would he have been safe? When Jesus looked round at all things, could he have been considering such things?

Well, let's see. Because although having looked around that evening, Jesus then goes back to Bethany overnight. And the next morning, Jesus returns to the temple.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts. He began driving out those who were buying and selling there.

[15:20] He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?

But you have made it a den of robbers. The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him.

For they feared him because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. What I find fascinating is that Jesus did this the next day on his return to Jerusalem, not on his visit after the procession.

I wonder why. In some ways, it would have made much more sense after the triumphant entry. He would have had the build-up of the procession, the backing of his followers and the crowds.

There would have been many more people there to witness his objections. And he must have been full of emotions, outrage, anger, frustration. But he does not act on these emotions.

[16:41] Instead, he pauses, he observes, he withdraws, and he waits. And he returns to Bethany.

This isn't inactivity, though. It's preparation. Returning to Bethany gives him the space and time of the journey, time to talk with his disciples and friends, and a safe place to have time with his father in prayer, aligning his next steps with divine purpose.

The temple protest would come, but after reflection, not impulse. And Mark tells us he did three things in the temple.

Overturn the tables of the money changers, overturn the seats of those who sold doves, and stop people carrying merchandise through the temple. And though this was likely the spark that triggers Jesus' arrest, there is no indication that Jesus was trying to cause a riot or stop the animals being sacrificed.

He could have gone to an entirely different place in the temple if that was his intention. So what was it? A clue to understanding the incident comes from the Old Testament line that Jesus quotes.

[18:01] My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. And he's quoting a line in Isaiah. These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. In Isaiah, this is a prediction of the future where Gentiles, non-Jews, who worship God, will be allowed to worship in the temple.

Not only Gentiles, but all those who are excluded from the worshipping community. Jesus also shockingly accuses the temple authorities as being as bad as bandits, saying they've turned the temple into a den of thieves.

Itself a quote from the prophet Jeremiah. Jesus was strongly, passionately objecting to the divisive and exploitative way in which the temple was being run.

But it wasn't a spontaneous or out-of-control protest. Jesus chooses where he positions himself. No people are touched or harmed.

[19:17] And he once again uses Old Testament scripture to convey his message. His actions were intentional, carefully thought and prayed through.

Yes, his actions were probably the last straw for those who opposed him. And it effectively sealed his fate in their eyes. But it was Jesus and not them who demonstrated careful, prayerful action. And so thinking how this might apply to us and our lives, I wonder how often we skip this step and just react to situations because of our emotions.

Maybe when we see something wrong, we are hurt or faced with a decision and the temptation is to rush, react and be hasty. Well, I'm not proud to admit that I have reacted out of anger in the past and it rarely goes well.

One of the things I've tried to do in the last few years is to respond and not react. And this is so hard when communication is so instant these days.

[20:31] We often feel pressured to reply straight away, not helped when we're fueled by emotion. And I'm particularly thinking about WhatsApp, which I use a lot, and about the urgency of seeing if someone has read your message and you see the little blue ticks and the pressure to immediately respond to that.

Whereas years ago, when we just had phones at home or would write letters to each other, there was much more time to reflect. But here we are in a world that rewards instant reaction.

And it's helpful to look at Jesus's intentional response. Jesus shows us another way, the power of the pause.

Pausing allows our emotions to settle, clarity to be formed, and prayer can reshape our perspective. If Jesus, the Son of God, chose to step back and align with the Father, how much more do we need to do the same?

And we can look at Jesus's pattern in today's passage to help us. So firstly, he looked honestly. He looked around at everything. He didn't ignore the reality.

[21:49] And praying means we must begin with the truth and what is clearly happening in our situation. Are we always honest with ourselves and God? Or do we tell ourselves a version that makes us feel better?

He stepped away intentionally. Jesus left the temple and went back to Bethany. And sometimes wisdom needs space and distance.

And sometimes clarity can happen on the journey too. Or it might give us a chance to encounter others and God. Seek God before acting.

Prayer shouldn't be a last resort. Seeing where God is pointing us towards so we can respond wisely and respond to a situation in a way that is true to our values.

And lastly, act with purpose, not impulse. Or respond, don't react, as I've learned with experience. When Jesus returns the next day, he acts decisively.

[23:00] Prayer doesn't make us passive, but it can prepare us to act rightly. And I wonder which of these resonates with you. Do you take space?

Talk to a trusted friend? Or retreat to pray maybe? I will share the worst temple moment that I've had in my life.

It was a few years back, finding out something uninspectedly, which meant that sadly my marriage was pretty much over. And I was shocked, furious, confused.

And I think I felt every emotional possible. And I physically felt them all in my body. And I don't remember very clearly, but I chose the intentional retreat.

I got in my car and I drove and drove. And eventually I parked up in a random pub car park, cried, prayed, and eventually spoke to a friend.

[24:01] Car journeys, it seems, and my Bethany. And it stopped me from reacting from those deep emotions and probably saying or doing something I might have later regretted.

And now I will often go for a drive or a walk if I need some thinking time. Additionally, when I wish to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, I postpone replying to a text message until the following day.

This approach aligns well with the prudent advice to sleep on it before providing a response. There will be times in our life when we all want to turn at the tables immediately, especially if something feels unjust, frustrating, or wrong.

We might want to send that text message, confront the person, make that decision quickly, or just fix it all now. But the question this passage asks us is, is this the right moment?

Or is it just an emotional one? Jesus teaches us that timing matters and timing is often discerned in prayer.

[25:22] When Jesus enters Jerusalem on a colt, not a war horse, we are shown that his kingdom isn't driven by force, but by humility and obedience.

Even his authority is expressed through patience, as I would imagine he would need it with a grumpy and slow donkey. The crowd expected immediate change, but Jesus chooses faithful timing.

In doing so, he shows us that God's work is not rushed, and that's about to be revealed step by step this week as Holy Week unfolds.

The passage this morning invites us to trust not only what God calls us to do, but when he calls to do it. Jesus didn't turn the tables that evening, not out of hesitation, but wisdom.

So the next time we stand in our own temple moments, we can remember Jesus' example and pause, pray, seek God, and then act so that we too can be aligned with the heart of God.

[26:39] Amen. Thanks very much indeed, Laura. Well done. There was a huge amount in that. It's a very full story.

So much again of wisdom in what Laura has been sharing with us there as well. So we're going to do what Laura suggests. We're going to take some time to pray, but as we do that, you might just want to perhaps hold your palm cross in your palm, maybe as a sort of tactile thing just to maybe focus on, keep your attention, something just to reflect on as we pray.

And as we pray, we'll just have some quiet music as well, and as I say, I'll lead us in some prayers. So Lord, we ask as we hold this cross in our palms, as we come now to spend some intentional

time with you.

We pray, Lord, that we'd be aware of your spirit in our lives. We pray, Lord, perhaps as we become aware of our breathing that as we breathe in, we'd know your presence going deeper into us. and as we breathe out that anything that's not of you, that's not helpful, would just be exhaled from our body.

[28:37] So come, Holy Spirit, and fill us afresh now, we pray as we pray. dear Lord, thank you for this Palm Sunday, when we remember your arrival into Jerusalem on a donkey, all that that means for how we're to see you and our world.

Thank you, Jesus, that although you are fully God, and therefore have all the authority and glory and honour that comes with that identity, still you emptied yourself of all that in order to be with us as fully human as us.

And yet in that emptying, thank you that you maintained the character of God, the character of love and humility, of compassion and kindness.

Thank you that in these qualities, in that lowly way in which you arrived on a donkey, we see in you the face of God, God who doesn't need a show-off or be feared, but a God who models for us an altogether better way of inclusion and welcome and joy and peace.

So help us, we pray, in all that we are, to work out what it means to live like you in every area of our lives.

[30:24] Calm our anxieties, calm our fears, would you give us rest where needed, love, but also enthusiasm for life, Lord.

Help us to increasingly understand that the point of this life is to accept just how loved we are by you, and to respond to that love in the way we see ourselves and others.

And so, Lord, in our working or school-college lives, in our home lives, our social settings. Help us to live gentle, humble, generous lives.

Help us to ride donkeys, Lord, not war horses. Help us to never lord it over or look down on others, but to be inspired by the way you're on the ground with us, among us, modelling a better more beautiful way.

Do we bring before you those known to us and even more known to you who are struggling at this time, maybe our friends, our families, our colleagues? Would you give us the insight to know how we can support them, pray for them, and in doing so, may your ways of healing, strengthening love, flow into their lives by your spirit.

[32:13] Lord, we're grateful for the way in which you took your time to respond to all that you saw going on in the temple when you arrived in Jerusalem. them. Thank you, Jesus, that you're not a hothead, never someone we need to make excuses for, but again, as Laura was outlining, how you took time out to reflect on your own, with friends, with your Heavenly Father, before responding.

Help us to learn from you, to follow your example of thinking and talking things through, of sleeping on things, perhaps, before we act.

Give us your patience, your perspective, your grace under pressure, we ask. But then thank you too, that although you took time to respond, that didn't diminish your sense of justice and the need to defend those who were being excluded.

In fact, it was just the opposite. Jesus, when you turned the tables of the money changers and traders in the temple, you were doing it in protest at the way the poorest, most vulnerable in society were being exploited.

Thank you that you stood up, that you stand up for those who are most in need of knowing your acceptance, your welcome, your love.

[33:57] Help us, we pray, to be like you, to be brave and imaginative in ways we might defend the oppressed, love those who might otherwise feel unloved, all while challenging the behaviour and systems that are powerful when they take advantage of their privilege for their own gain.

and then bigger still, Lord, help us, help all the political parties and leaders who represent us to follow your lead in loving mercy, acting justly and walking humbly.

I pray especially for those leaders who have such influence on the course of events in the Middle East at this time, the power they hold and often tragically the oppression they unleash.

May your donkey riding, table turning ways break through into these current wars and conflicts so that your hope of lasting, loving peace might emerge.

In all these prayers, Lord, the local, the national, the personal, the public, thank you that you are present in them all, the God who is at one and the same time, the cosmic Christ, and our dearest, nearest friend.

[35:36] fill us with your spirit, we pray, that we might know your love and in turn share your love with those you've gifted us to live alongside.

side. spirit, your love, your love, And as we breathe out anything that is not of you, may the fact we are filled with your presence guide and shape our lives, both now and always, we pray.

all these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Saviour, and our friend.

Amen. Amen.