

Last week, we said that Jesus is God with skin on. In the church language, it is said that Jesus is the Incarnated God. The purpose of God's incarnation was to bring God's people back to God by forgiving them and giving them life. The way Jesus brought God's people back to God was through סולחה (sulha)— peacemaking with bread breaking, not with bloodshedding. In today's story, Jesus is on His way to offer Himself as "the Bread of Life" (John 6:35) and be broken for all sinners like you and me. Today, we have the story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

In the days of Jesus, Rome owned the civilized world and ran it in the first century. Outside of the Oriental dynasties in the Far East, Rome held the civilized world from Spain to India. One man ruled Rome. His name was Caesar. This Caesar ruled the entire world. That's a difficult task. So, what Caesar did was split up his kingdom into lots of different regions and parts and then put rulers over those regions. Those rulers were responsible for maintaining political stability, collecting taxes, and doing everything needed. And they ruled in the name of Caesar.

In the Roman Empire, however, there was one problematic place. They called this region "Judea and Samaria." It was one of the most politically frustrating parts of the entire Roman Empire. It was a political hotbed. It was completely unstable because Jewish people who lived in that area refused to engage and take part in the polytheistic Roman deity system and worship Caesar as Lord. It would not be a good PR to wipe out the entire group of these Jewish people. So, Caesar created what was called "the Jewish exception." From this, Caesar got brownie points from Jewish people. However, that was a dangerous place to live in.

When Jesus was born, this region was ruled by Herod the Great, a Roman Jewish king of Judea. And almost immediately after Jesus was born, Herod the Great died and passed his kingdom to his three sons. These sons—Herod Antipas, Archelaus, and Philip—divided up the regions their father ruled into three. Antipas and Philip ruled over their given areas well, but not Archelaus. Archelaus was removed from the kingship immediately, and Rome took the opportunity to put their own guy in there. The new guy assigned to govern Judea and Samaria was this well-known guy, Pontius Pilate. He did not want to live in Jerusalem, where all Jewish religious activities occurred. So, he lived in Cesarea, the city that Herod the Great built to honor Caesar. This city was about comfort, luxury, prestige, and power.

When the Jews had this festival once a year called "Passover," this was a dangerous time in Judea and Samaria for Rome because all Jews came to Jerusalem to commemorate the Jews' deliverance from the mighty empire of Egypt. Their Passover meal commemorates the bitterness of slavery under an oppressive regime and a sweet taste of freedom. This gathering made the Romans nervous because this gathering of Jews was a potential revolt against Rome.

So, Pontius Pilate, the governor of this area, had to come to Jerusalem in all of his imperial majesties to remind the Jewish pilgrims that Rome was in charge. Pilate and his armed Roman soldiers entered Jerusalem from the West of the Mount of Olives to put on a great big show of power, wealth, and glory. They came to make sure the Jews didn't start making any trouble.

This is the background against the Palm Sunday Parade we know of. As Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the West, Jesus approached from the East. Jesus came on a borrowed donkey. He came surrounded by a pretty rag-tag bunch of disciples—tax collectors, fishermen, and farmers. He came followed by crowds of people who had been touched and healed by the Son of God. He came followed by the man whose blind eyes had been made to see; the woman who had been healed after years of bleeding; the lame who had found they could walk again; the dead who had been brought to life again. He came surrounded by the shouts of Hosanna—which means "save us now!" He came to provide "the Bread of Life" to those who needed life.

The thing is that these entries to the West and the East are not historical episodes. I am not telling this story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem just in case you like history books. All over the world today, these two parades we just heard about in Jerusalem are marching.

Perhaps some of us have seen an armored motorcade with the president or world leader in it—the long parade of big black cars and secret service agents; usually, the road is blocked off, and the whole parade is surrounded by police cars. The parade of power and might will never go out of style.

But the Jesus parade is still marching on today, too. It is the parade that marches to a quiet but unmistakable, unbending, unyielding drumbeat of the "Kin-dom." I see this parade in those who care for the homeless, the immigrants, the asylum seekers, and the vulnerable children of our city. This parade goes marching on any time any

one of us, in whatever quiet, humble, modest way, stands up for right, makes a choice for peace, shares what we have, shows compassion for another fellow human being, and holds out a hand. They are the ones who say that Jesus is the Son of God. They are the ones who ride on a donkey with Jesus.

I dare to ask us today the question Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say Jesus is?" Our answer will determine the way we enter Jerusalem. I pray that our parade comes marching through here every Sunday to sing our Hosannas, lift our praise and petition to our God, wave our "palms," and lay down our lives to the one we call the Son of God. Let us march towards the cross, towards Easter, for partaking in "the Bread of Life" by riding on a donkey with Jesus by confessing that He is the Son of God today. Amen.