

## **Palm Sunday, 2023**

### **Matthew 21:1-11 "The Return of the King"**

#### **Read Matthew 21:1-11.**

1. This story is very familiar to many people. Does anything about it strike you in a new way this time?

*An open-ended question allowing for free-flowing discussion.*

#### **For comparison, read Mark 11:1-10.**

2. Each of the gospel writers chose to emphasise different things in their stories. What are some of the differences you see between Matthew's telling of the Triumphal entry and Mark's? Do you think all of the differences are relevant? Why or why not?

*Some differences:*

- *Matthew quotes Zech 9:9 directly.*
- *Matthew has a colt and its mother; Mark only has one colt.*
- *Mark's colt has never been ridden; Matthew's doesn't say.*
- *Mark has the bystanders question the disciples who are taking the colt.*
- *Matthew uses the phrase "Son of David".*
- *Mark has "leafy branches cut from the fields"; Matthew has "branches from the trees". (This may be an example of an irrelevant difference.)*
- *Matthew has the city stirred up.*
- *Matthew has the city ask "Who is this?" and the crowds reply "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

*Not all the differences may be relevant, but as the sermon spoke about, some 'minor' differences may also be relevant. Matthew is the only account to use "Son of David", a Messianic term. Matthew's gospel is very concerned with showing Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy (hence the quotation of Zechariah), and with Jesus' identity as King of Israel. This question is not intended to get at people's lack of knowledge, but to elicit a curiosity about why different gospel writers emphasised different things, and to allow for a playfulness in exploring Scripture.*

3. In the sermon Karen showed how Matthew is using the word 'stirred up' (v10) to reference earthquakes. Some other places he uses the same word are: Matt 8:24; Matt 27:51-53; Matt 27:54; Matt 28:2; Matt 28:4. Each of these is unique to Matthew's gospel. Why do you think he chose these places to use the word 'earthquake'?

*Each of the references is either to an act of God (stilling of sea, crucifixion, resurrection) or to people's reaction to the act of God (the centurion's faith; the*

*guards' fear). All of the references are connected to Jesus' identity (a key emphasis of Matthew's gospel).*

4. Karen suggested in her sermon that the use of earthquakes is linked to the Day of the Lord, and that Matthew is intentionally making this connection. The prophets use this phrase to refer both to the end times and also to other times when God acts in salvation and judgment. Why do you think Matthew used earthquake imagery for the triumphal entry in particular?

**Read Zech 9:9-10 and Zech 14:1-9.**

5. Why did Jesus choose these prophecies in particular to enact? What do you think his purpose was in intentionally 'declaring' himself in this way?

*These passages talk about the coming of the King of Israel, and the coming of God. By choosing these passages, Jesus is finally 'declaring' himself in the Triumphal entry. But he is also declaring the type of King he is: one who is humble, one who brings peace. His purpose in declaring himself is a trickier question – was it to provoke the religious leaders intentionally? Was it to show the world that he was the Messiah? Other ideas?*

**Karen quoted this prayer in her sermon, and invited us to acknowledge Jesus' kingship in our lives by bringing all of ourselves to him in surrender:**

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me." (St Ignatius of Loyola)

6. Did you fast from anything during Lent? If so, reflect on the experience as it relates to this prayer. Would you say that the experience of fasting helps you pray this prayer more authentically? Why or why not?

*Fasting can help us see how we are attached to things/experiences of this world. By abstaining from them, we loosen their hold in our lives, allowing us to turn them over more freely to Jesus. This question is intended to have people reflect on their Lenten journey, especially the discipline of fasting, to see if and how it helped them draw closer to Jesus.*

**For deeper study: Read Hebrews 12:18-29.**

7. Some of the ways Matthew uses earthquakes is to describe people's reaction to God. How does this passage from Hebrews connect to what Matthew is doing with earthquakes and the Day of the Lord?

*The Psalms often reference the godly "not being shaken" (Ps 16:8, Ps 62:2 are two examples). The women at the tomb were not shaken like the guards when the*

*earthquake happened. There seems to be a connection between faith and not being shaken. You can play with this connection in discussion with your group.*