

“Seeking: Where Are You Headed?”  
Matthew 21:1-11

Today I would like to begin with a Robert Frost poem called “Armful”

For every parcel I stoop down to seize  
I lose some other off my arms and knees,  
And the whole pile is slipping, bottles, buns,  
Extremes too hard to comprehend at once  
Yet nothing I should care to leave behind.  
With all I have to hold with hand and mind  
And heart, if need be, I will do my best.  
To keep their building balanced at my breast.  
I crouch down to prevent them as they fall;  
Then sit down in the middle of them all.  
I had to drop the armful in the road  
And try to stack them in a better load.

Why do you think we try to carry so many things in our arms? Whether emotional clutter or material possessions, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by life.

This came to my mind as I thought of the journey of Jesus into Jerusalem in what became known later as his triumphal entry. That was a turning point for his ministry and yet it was a continuation of his invitation to followers to let go of the illusion of trying to carry all the burdens of life alone and through the normal methods. There was another parade happening at the same time. This was the parade of the entry of Pilate which represented the power of the Roman Empire. The people who marched in that parade were encumbered by the heavy armor representing the power and grandeur of the empire. The ruler came riding a strong horse showing off power. And the people who gathered to watch the parade were carrying the heavy burdens of oppression, but who got used to these burdens and thought of them as their lot in life. Even though they might have privately resented the empire, they had quietly adjusted to the world around them. Even though the parcels would fall down and would have to always be picked up, that was just the way things were.

The parade of Jesus was a pause of rearranging the parcels, i.e., the priorities of life. It was an invitation to reclaim a path for peace that didn't include violence, injustice, and exploitation. A leader did not need to oppress their people in order to keep them loyal and the key was not some new or alternative political view, but a path of descent into the basics of the human soul.

When we looked at Jesus' journey in the wilderness, he began with facing the temptation of picking up the parcels of power, security, and esteem. But Jesus knew that his true fulfillment could only come from God. And here again after three years wandering and teaching with his disciples and followers, Jesus chose to focus on the power of the human soul.

The illusions of Pilate's parade included the usual promise of peace that would come through efficiency, power, dominance, and accumulation. In contrast, Jesus' parade was about letting go and trusting in the power of God and of community. All the elements of his parade were simple and humble: The donkey, the garments, the branches from surrounding trees, and the crowd were all humble signs of a servant leader.

The Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as a deliberate attempt by him to reveal himself as the peaceful Messiah. Matthew does this by quoting the prophet directly as he so often does. Matthew also alludes to it by Jesus' choice of a donkey to ride by sending two of his disciples into Bethphage to bring him the humblest of animals. Zechariah's prophecy symbolized the peaceful choice of a victorious king selecting a donkey as his ride instead of a conqueror's proud steed for his triumphal entry into his capital city.

Let's listen to the story from Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.<sup>[a]</sup>" <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup>"Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd<sup>[b]</sup> spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

And now we are going to enter into the story with our parcels and burdens to let Christ help us find the power of walking with him, even when the road ahead is not clear.

We will begin a time of centering ourselves. I invite you to take a few moments to breathe in and breathe out. Spend this time centering yourself to listen to what God may be saying to you during this time of prayer, to listen to what rises up in your heart. Close your eyes for a few moments. As you sit with your eyes closed, use these or similar words: "Here I am, Lord. Here I am, ready to walk with you."

Imagine it's a beautiful spring day. The sun is shining, the air is warm, and the sense of new life surrounds you. You are walking along a narrow path in a large city that you've visited many times. You love this place—the small, narrow streets crowded with people, the marketplace with its smells and noises. As you walk, you see a crowd forming along the street in front of you. It looks like they are lining the street for some reason. You wonder what's going on, so you walk towards the street. When you get closer, you can hear people chanting, but you can't make out the words. They seem to be waving something up and down.

When you get to the street, there are many people smiling and waving large branches. Some have put their cloaks on the ground. There must be some royalty or wealthy person coming, you think. You look down the street, and a few feet away is a man sitting on a donkey. He is waving to the crowd, but his face is so serious. You get to the front of the crowd so you can see him more closely. He is in front of you and stops. He looks at you. You recognize him. It's Jesus; he's the one everyone's been talking about. You take a moment to tell him about your burdens...Jesus speaks to you. Jesus lingers there for a few minutes with you. He seems like he wants to get off the donkey, to stay with you, to enter the main part of the city. But he doesn't move. He sits there looking at you. The crowd's voices get louder and louder. They are yelling out, praising him saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus reaches down for your hand. You reach up and hold Jesus' hand. After a few moments, you start walking with Jesus down the road. You have no idea where you are going, but it does not matter at all.

When you are ready, you can go back to this time with gratitude in your heart but also with a prayer to be able to see the burdens of your life in light of God's eternal love. Let these words of Jesus carry you through this week:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 Amen.