

# ***Wilderness: Jerusalem***

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April 5, 2020

Matthew 21:1–11

The Gospel of Matthew feels like a long-lost friend that we are embracing after a socially distant five weeks apart this morning. We last read from Matthew on the first Sunday in Lent when Jesus was led by Holy Spirit into the wilderness and tempted right after his baptism. And remember what he did from there?

He called his disciples, went up on that mount and blessed the people, told them to be light and salt, reminded them of their beloved-ness, and showed them how to pray. He continued to heal people, offer words on right living in community, and point the people toward God, the one who loved and created them.

And then it was time to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Jesus had a good size following by then, and according to Matthew his fame had not spread as much into Jerusalem. The people in Galilee knew who he was and those in the Decapolis were following too.

Who is this? That's what Matthew says the people asked after Jesus entered through the back gate of the city, through a crowd waving palms and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

How interesting that the crowd is blessing Jesus. We've been talking a lot about blessings since our time in the Sermon on the Mount and I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus' arrival is met with blessings from those who know him. Now is their turn to offer the blessings on this one who taught them, loved them, blessed them.

Once he entered the whole city was in turmoil because they heard about the demonstration led by Jesus making its way through the city. That's why they said, "Who is this?" His beloved community agenda hadn't made it all the way through the city yet—sure some folks knew of him and were following him, but by day they probably worked for the Roman Empire and kept their heads down, kept going to work, doing the best they could do. The powerful in the government and established religion were aware of him because he was considered a troublemaker.

Speaking truth in the midst of a controlled message tends to have that impact on people.

We usually spend our time on Palm Sunday with Jesus on that dusty road into Jerusalem with the shouts of Hosanna in the open air. But there are some other Hosanna shouts in our passage today that we don't normally read about on Palm Sunday.

Jesus went straight to the Temple and children gathered around him and continued to shout, "Hosanna!" In Matthew, this is when Jesus starts overturning tables and healing people in the Temple.

There was something about the deeply held belief that all were God's beloved and those blessings, that commitment to life in beloved community that when he saw people who were sick and people who were being preyed upon economically by those in power that he couldn't take it anymore.

He was stuck on the message coming from the religious and political leaders that the economy mattered more than people's lives. So right there, in the Temple he overturned the tables and he started healing people on the spot.

It certainly got the attention of the authorities. That might have been the last straw, according to the Gospel of Matthew because now he was talking about those pretending to have religious authority in order to prey on people.

Jesus began his last week with a march about the importance of life—life for everyone. His calls all through this gospel have been about right living and the importance of caring for one another and the community at large. His entrance into Jerusalem was quiet, but once he got there, he was drawing attention to exactly what he believed.

The call of Jesus always sounds like one toward the goodness of the whole. Toward the well-being and the wholeness of everyone.

There was an awareness in Jesus that day, and every day. He walked into a city amid shouts of "Save us" and with people asking, "Who is this?"

The first Palm Sunday, Jesus walked into and out of Jerusalem the same Jesus he had always been— one who knew deeply his identity and one who believed in the possibilities of beloved community. He knew who he was and that he was loved by God.

We are invited to do the same this week. Remembering who we are—that identity Jesus has been trying to tell us about for the whole gospel of Matthew

This morning remember that you are beloved, blessed, you are light, and you are salty, you are prayer-filled followers of Jesus, who live in beloved community.

Even when we apart, we are all of these things. And we follow Jesus who showed us the way, especially in the difficult times—the way of peace, the way of hope, and the way of love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.