

## **The Power of Love or the Love of Power Matthew 21:1-11**

When I was growing up in Northwestern Ohio, I listened to three radio stations. WJR out of Detroit for Rock and Roll, WSM out of Nashville but only on clear nights when I could tune in the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night. And finally WOWO out of Ft. Wayne Indiana, which was a classic station with farm reports and music and commentary and news. From WOWO I first heard of Paul Harvey. Paul Harvey used to tell stories and he would first set up what seemed like a regular story and then he would surprise us with what he called: "The Rest of the Story - filling in a surprising detail.

So today, with the help of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan and their book, **The Last Week**, I am going to tell you the rest of the story of Palm Sunday. For all of our lives we have heard the story of Jesus' parade. But in order to really understand Jesus' Palm Sunday ride into Jerusalem, we must understand that at that time during every Passover scores upon scores of Jewish people would be killed in demonstrations that suddenly turned violent. Why? Passover which will be celebrated Monday evening by our Jewish Sister and Brothers was a celebration remembering the breaking free of the Jewish people trapped in slavery in Egypt. By the time Jesus came along the Jewish people were once more in a kind of slavery. This time it was the Romans who were their masters.

By the time of Jesus, riots and demonstrations were such a regular part of Passover that every spring Pontius Pilate would leave his headquarters in Caesarea fifty miles to the west, travel across the countryside and finally process through the streets of Jerusalem to his palace there. Every year he would ride on a war horse, with dozens of chariots behind him, soldiers with swords in hand, the Roman flags flying.

Pilate was expressing the Roman and his Love of Power. His parade, designed to display Rome's power sent a clear message to the crowds: "Don't forget who is boss in these parts. Caesar is God, and he has the army to prove it.

You won't read about Pilate's annual parade in the gospels. It's not there. The only reason we know about it at all is through the stories told by historians and others of the time. No it is not there, because it is the story of the losing side, but we will get to that later. But the fact is, Jesus' parade through the streets of Jerusalem cannot be understood unless you know something about Pilate's parade. Because you see while Pilate, with his chariots and his armed soldiers and his flags flying was coming from Caesarea in the west... across town at that same moment there was another procession coming from the Mount of Olives in the east. Jesus was at the head of this parade. Jesus knew about Pilate coming to town at Passover to intimidate the people. He knew Pilate carefully planned and meticulously staged a march into town with weapons and a show of force. So, from all accounts Jesus carefully planned and a march of his own.

Jesus answered Rome's love of Power with the Power of Love. Jesus knew that Pilate would be riding a war horse. So Jesus, remembering what the prophet Zechariah had said the Messiah would do one day, rode a donkey. Because that's what the King of Love rides, because he is a peacemaker not a conquerer..

Jesus knew Pilate would come with a battalion of soldiers carrying swords and shields So, Jesus comes into town with a rag tag bunch of peasants armed only with tree branches and the shirts off their backs.

Jesus knew that Pilate's soldiers would be crying out: "Caesar is Lord" as they passed through the streets...

at the same moment his "army" was crying out: "Hosanna Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the (true) Lord."

Jesus' parade almost seems like a parody of Pilate's parade. Showing how foolish and arrogant Pilate's pretensions to power were in the face of God's power of love.

Jesus was presenting to the world an alternative to everything Pilate and Rome represented— wealth, power, privilege, a system that favored the rich at the expense

of the poor... A system that boasted how mighty it was but actually quaked in its boots when people took to the streets wanting to be free.

Jesus declares that God loves the people and weeps when any of them are getting hurt or abused.

Jesus' actions on Palm Sunday make it clear that the religion that bears his name is not just a spiritual thing that happens in a person's heart.

It is also a social thing that happens in a community's heart.

When Jesus rode that day into Jerusalem— the center of people's lives— his message was clear.

“Rome, you are not in charge. God is in charge. And when you oppress people and hold them down, God will have a word with you.”

We know that by the end of the week, this man on the donkey will be dead at Pilate's hand. Jesus probably knew very well that day that it was inevitable that HE would be the casualty at this year's Passover.

But he rode into Jerusalem anyway and took Pilate head on.

He did it because he was convinced that the power of love will always win in the end.

Even if it appears that Power overcomes Love. It is only temporary.

Even if we see them lay Jesus in the grave, God is not through,

God will simply raise love from the dead.

Jesus knew the sun rises in the east. That is why it was no coincidence he chose to ride into town from the east. Pilate came riding in from the west. Jesus must have smiled at that. Because the sun sets in the west.

That is to say, Pontius Pilate can kill this Jesus and all that he stands for, but death cannot keep love down. Pilate forgot that the Son rises in the east. AMEN

**Matthew 21:1-11**

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"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."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!"

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