

Saint Andrew's Daily Lenten Discipline 2026

Walking the Palm Sunday Path

Week Six: Holy Week March 29-April 4

Matthew 21: 1-11 Jesus's Triumphal Entry

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 fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

"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."

Synopsis for Palm Sunday: Matthew 21:1–11 Jesus's Triumphal Entry (Matthew's Version)

Yes, the first week in this series dwelled in a story of Jesus's triumphal entry (from Luke), but on Palm Sunday we return to the event, now told from Matthew's point of view. Several weeks ago Luke showed us a hopeful crowd acclaiming Jesus as a God-sent king. Here, on Palm Sunday, our attention falls on the symbolism Jesus chooses for the occasion. He embarks on a royal procession into the city that represents Israel's hopes of living as God's redeemed people. Yet this royal procession intends to be strange, for it inverts the expected symbols and values. Jesus eschews a horse and other signs of dominance. He subverts conventional understandings of greatness, success, and power. And he does all of that in the face of imperious power, for Roman authorities are likely already gathering in the city in advance of Passover.

Accordingly, the church does not exist to rule like kings in Jesus's absence. We take on the same kind of dispossessed power, eschewing the tools of supremacy and coercion. We recognize the risks in doing so, for the powers-that-be do not appreciate being held accountable or having their oppressive character unmasked. The point of it all, finally, is the cry of "Hosanna!" ("Save now!"). We proclaim a king, a leader, a savior who isn't interested in seizing power for himself but in

extending protection to all who need it. The Palm Sunday Path calls us to make that proclamation public.

Commentary: Bill Tesch

This Lenten series began with Luke's version of Palm Sunday, where joyful acclamation fills the air. Luke 19:28–40 gives us a procession so hope-filled that at any moment even the stones may cry out. For many preachers—especially those serving in divided contexts—Luke feels like an easier entry into Holy Week, one that does not immediately stir the political tensions already present in our pews.

But the series concludes with Matthew's account, and Matthew is different. Where Luke invites us to sing, Matthew invites us to **see**—to see the truth about authoritarian power and what happens when God's mercy and love confront it. Matthew sets Jesus's humble entry against a familiar imperial spectacle: the military show of force that embodied Rome's false promise of stability—not the peace of God, but a brittle order secured through fear and domination; one that feels solid, yet is always on shaky ground.

When Jesus enters the city, Matthew tells us, the whole city is shaken. The verb used in verse 10 is related to the noun *seismos*, an earthquake (see also Matthew 27:51; 28:2, 4). In Matthew's vision, it is mercy, not force, that makes the powers tremble. Jesus brings no army; he comes vulnerable and unguarded. Not atop a war horse, but humble and riding on a donkey. And remarkably, it is **this** simple, vulnerable procession that unsettles a city mesmerized by the empty promises of coercive power. Jesus's way teaches that authentic authority is never built on fear.

Speaking truth without deepening division?

As a bishop serving preachers across a politically mixed region—congregations that include red, purple, and blue—I find this contrast especially poignant. Our people are not villains; they are faithful, hard-working neighbors who genuinely want to do what is right. Yet they arrive at worship shaped all week by voices they trust, fears they carry quietly, and competing stories about what “stability” requires—stories that speak far more loudly and persistently than the 20 minutes, if that, they hear in a Sunday sermon.

Preachers feel this pressure acutely. They know the vulnerability of stepping into a pulpit where every word is weighed. They long to proclaim the gospel truthfully while preserving trust—to care for people across the spectrum and to avoid placing already vulnerable neighbors at greater risk. Many quietly ask, “How do I speak truth without deepening division?”

This is where Matthew becomes a gift rather than a burden. He does not require the preacher to become a political pundit. Instead, he offers a theological vocabulary for talking about power without centering who holds it. Matthew helps us see that domination is not the same as authority, spectacle is not the same as truth, and fear can never bring stability.

Naming this—whether in a pulpit, in a coffee shop, or in the streets—does not require shaming. It calls instead for compassion and clarity. Many parishioners are navigating complex pressures and conflicting narratives, often without realizing how deeply those stories shape them. This is not to suggest that people lack agency or intelligence in forming their convictions. Still, in an

information-saturated environment, exposure matters, and sustained engagement with theologically rich biblical teaching is often scarce.

Interrupting competing narratives

Matthew invites us to interrupt competing narratives—not by attacking them, but by placing Jesus’s own satirical display of power before the congregation, allowing other stories to be questioned, not directly, but subtly and artfully.

In our own time, Matthew’s narrative helps us recognize patterns that echo the dynamics Jesus exposes. These are not abstractions, but lived realities affecting neighbors whom God loves: cruelty functioning not as an accident of law enforcement but as a feature of it; public humiliation used as political theater to signal strength; racial profiling treated as an acceptable tactic rather than a moral failure; economic systems in which harm flows downward while wealth flows upward; and, at times, the name of Jesus invoked to defend such practices. Matthew’s aim, however, is not condemnation but revelation—to help us see that systems built on fear and dehumanization can never deliver the stability they promise. They may project strength, but they cannot create peace. They claim to secure order, yet in Jesus’s presence they are the ones that shake.

This is why Matthew’s Palm Sunday is such a gift in polarized contexts. It offers unveiling rather than accusation. Matthew helps shift the sermon away from blaming people toward clarifying our vision. His account becomes a kind of sacred theater in which the nature of power is revealed, enabling congregations to discern without weaponizing the pulpit.

Walking the Palm Sunday Path is a sermon series/commentary series for Lent by Working Preacher
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching-series/walking-the-palm-sunday-path-in-lent-a-sermon-series-for-2026>