



Palm Sunday

Tableaus

Scriptures & Reflections

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21: 1-11

The Tableau begins with the reading of Scripture. The actors enter when the music begins. After the actors are in place and freeze, read the Reflection.

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, 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.*

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21: 1-11

It must have been quite a sight that day as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. While there is no red carpet to be rolled out, the crowds are giving Jesus the *red carpet* treatment. They are welcoming him into the *holy city* like a conquering hero.

There is great joy and excitement—even a bit of pomp and circumstance—as they spread their cloaks and palm branches in the street before him. But their intense passion will take a dramatic turn against Jesus within the course of this week. On Sunday, they welcome him into Jerusalem with shouts of *Hosanna!* On Friday, they will send him to Golgotha and the cross with shouts of *Crucify him!*

As Jesus enters the city, how prophetic are their shouts of *Hosanna!* *Hosanna* means *help us...or...save us, please*. What a fitting way to begin the events of this week that has come to be known as *Holy Week*. Jesus is entering the city to save them, although they cannot possibly imagine the twists and turns God's act of redemption will take.

Yes, Jesus comes as their *Messiah*, the one chosen by God, to set them free. But the freedom they want is not the freedom Jesus comes to give. They want freedom from the Romans; Jesus brings freedom from sin. They want freedom from a life of servitude to the Roman Empire here and now; Jesus offers them a life of faith-bound servanthood in the kingdom of heaven that is both here and is yet to come.

It is a classic case of *cross purposes*—not the *cross purposes* of their wants and desires as opposed to the kingdom Jesus offers, but the *cross purposes* of God's grace and love played out in this mighty act of redemption.

Within the taciturn events of this week, the wiles of the world try to thwart the work of God, but it is the world with all its wisdom and power that is thwarted. The world watches dumbfounded as God uses the rejection, defeat and death of his Son to win the ultimate Victory on Easter morning.

Hosanna shouted the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem 2000 years ago to do the work of God. And *Hosanna* we shout as Jesus enters our hearts today to do the work of God.

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34-40

The Tableau begins with the actors taking their in place. Once the actors are in place, read the Scripture. After the actors freeze, read the Reflection. The music follows.

(When Jesus came into the Temple, the religious leaders questioned him trying to discredit him in the eyes of the people.)

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. *Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?* He said to him, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34-40

When Jesus is questioned by the religious leaders of the Jews, tension usually fills the air. Such is the case as he is questioned by the scribe in the Temple. The spectacle of Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem two days before is fresh in their minds. It epitomizes the *Jesus problem* they are having to deal with. Jesus' growing popularity is becoming their growing problem.

His desecration of the Temple the day after his grand procession into the city—turning over the tables and driving out the money changers—only adds fuel to the fires of their animosity. They have to silence Jesus, and they have to do it now.

As Jesus enters the Temple on day three, the first to undertake the task of discrediting Jesus are the Pharisees—the rabbis. They ask questions to put Jesus in a bind. *Tell us, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?* Their question is an attempt to get Jesus into trouble with the Romans and cause him lose favor with the people. Jesus silences them instead. **Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**

The Sadducees—the priests—are the next to try to silence him. *A widow of seven husbands—all brothers—dies. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?* **You are wrong about the resurrection,** said Jesus. **In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels. God is God not of the dead, but of the living.**

Now the scribe takes his shot at Jesus. *Which is the greatest commandment of the Law?* Rather than getting into another testy exchange, Jesus simply quotes from the Schema, the great confession of faith among the Jews. **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.** This is the greatest and first commandment. **And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The leaders try to discredit Jesus. They try to get him into trouble with the Romans; they try to make him look foolish; they try to drive a wedge between Jesus and the people; they try lure him into a trap that will derail the work of redemption he has come to do. And through it all, Jesus walks the walk living the faith he proclaims. He loves God *with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.* And he loves us all, even those who try to sabotage all that he has come to do.

Parable of the Bridesmaids

Matthew 25: 1-13

The Tableau begins with the actors taking their in place. Once the actors are in place, read the Scripture. After the actors freeze, read the Reflection. The music follows.

(After Jesus silences the religious leaders, he teaches in the Temple telling stories that proclaim his vision of the kingdom of heaven.)

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, *Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.* Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, *Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.* But the wise replied, *No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.* And while they went to buy it, (pause) the bridegroom came (pause) and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; (pause) and the door was shut. (Kham shuts the door) Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, *Lord, lord, open to us.* But he replied, *Truly I tell you, I do not know you.* Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Parable of the Bridesmaids

Matthew 25: 1-13

It is intriguing that Jesus tells this parable of the *Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids* so close to the end of his ministry. We might think he would tell it near the beginning so that the people would be vigilant and attentive to his words.

But more important than Jesus' words is the act of redemption God is about to do through the cross. The call to vigilance and readiness is meant to prepare the people to see the redemptive work of God that will take place in a most unusual way.

Most of the time, we look for the work of God in the wrong places. We look for his hand in soaring triumphs, in times of plenty—we look for the work of God in the good times and good things of life. But if our focus is there, we miss God's greatest works of all—the blessings he offers and the victories he achieves through the defeats of life.

The ways of the world are too imprinted in our DNA to see God in the sorrows and the defeats of life. Without this vigilance, without the prescriptive lenses of faith, we cannot see the hand of God in the shadows and dark places of life. Without this vigilance, we are like the foolish bridesmaids who go to the party assuming they are ready—assuming they have everything they need. But life is full of surprises—and so is God!

It is only the bridesmaids who are vigilant—it is only the bridesmaids who are prepared for the unexpected—that gain entry into the wedding feast. Likewise, it is only the vigilant who are prepared to encounter God's work in the shadows and dark places of life that enter into the joy of the marriage feast of the kingdom.

The world cannot see the cross as a symbol of victory. The victory of the cross can only be seen as we look at it through the prescriptive lenses of faith.

Only the vigilant—only those who anticipate the work of God in the midst of death—will be able to enter into the life that is given in the wedding feast of the kingdom of heaven.

The Judgment of the Nations

Matthew 25: 31-46

The Tableau begins with the actors taking their in place. Once the actors are in place, read the Scripture. After the actors freeze, read the Reflection. The music follows.

(Jesus continues teaching in the Temple.)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, *Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.* Then the righteous will answer him, *Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.* Then he will say to those at his left hand, *You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.* Then they also will answer, *Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*

The Judgment of the Nations

Matthew 25: 31-46

When Jesus is asked, *What is the greatest commandment of the Law*, he answers with the Schema: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*. The religious leaders can have no quarrel with that. The Schema is the closest thing the Jews have to a creedal statement. They may question Jesus about what it means; they may ask him how we are supposed to show that love; but neither they—nor we—can argue against what he says. The most important thing we do in faith—the very essence of faith itself—is to love God.

But how do we express our love for God? Jesus answers that question in the parable of *The Judgment of the Nations*. In Matthew's narrative, this is the last parable Jesus ever tells.

This parable captures the essence of the message Jesus has proclaimed throughout his ministry. Faith—love of God—is expressed not in grand public displays of piety, not in ostentatious offerings to the Temple treasury, not in rhapsodic words of prayer and liturgy. True faith—true love of God—is expressed in humble acts of love and kindness to those in need.

When was it we showed you our love, Lord? When was it we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? When was it we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Words of faith are important, as are words of love. And as with love, while the words are important, it is the things we do—our acts of compassion and the sacrifices we make for the other—that make the greatest and most eloquent affirmations of our love.

In this last parable he ever tells, Jesus is making it clear how we are to express our love for God and our love for him. Our love for God and for Jesus is spoken most clearly in the acts of kindness, gentleness and compassion we share with those in need.

Jesus loves us with a love that is beyond words, with a love that bears us from death to life on the cross. There on the cross, he shows us just how much he and the Father love us. Do we love him beyond words! Do we love him enough to see him in the face of all the others for whom he died!