

“Back in The Saddle Again!”

April 2, 2023

6th Sunday of Lent (Palm Sunday)

Scripture: Matthew 21: 1-17

1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethpage, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them.' And he will send them back ASAP." 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 "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."

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 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!"

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil... 12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

13 He said to them, "It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of thieves." 14 The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did... they became angry and told him to disband the crowd. 17 He then turned his back on them and left the city for Bethany...

Sermon — A humorous dramatization for your enjoyment!

Steve: Good morning and welcome to the sixth Sunday of Lent. This morning is also typically called Palm Sunday - which is really a misnomer.

Now there are many things about “Palm Sunday” that most Christians get very wrong.

First, I’ve been to Jerusalem and there are very few palm trees, but there are lots of olive trees all over the place. So, the branches that the crowds cut down and threw Jesus’ way would most likely have been olive branches. The symbolism of which actually seems far more apropos.

In fac . . .

Bridget Bombshell (Cathy): We interrupt this regularly-scheduled program for breaking news. Hello, I’m Bridget Bombshell with Jerusalem’s Channel 33 Eyewitness News, the AD 33 that is, covering all that is happening in year 33 of the Common Era, here in Jerusalem, Roman occupied Palestine.

We go live now to our action news reporter, Ezekiel Exaggeration at the site of what appears to be a riot breaking out in East Jerusalem. Ezekiel where are you exactly and what can you tell us?

Ezekiel Exaggeration (Steve): Yes, thanks Bridget. I'm here at the intersection of Kidron Valley Road and Temple Avenue. And as you can see behind me, on the other side of the police line, there is quite a commotion as a riot seems to be headed our way and towards the Temple Mount! As you can also see the police are in full riot gear lined up at the base of the Mount with helmets, shields and tear gas masks.

I can make out some of the signs, one says, "Poor Peoples' Lives Matter," and another, "God's Temple is For All," and "Out with the Corrupt Priests!" and here's another, "We Demand Sacrificial Reform," oh and here's an interesting one, "Jesus for President!"

Some are chanting, others are singing and shouting religious slogans. "We want shalom," and "No Jesus, no shalom!" And "We want Jesus!"

And look there he is, it would appear that the local legend from the hills of Nazareth, that Galilean Gadfly, Jesus has finally brought his culturally divisive and religiously offensive miracle show to our fair city, Jerusalem.

Bridget Bombshell: Well, we certainly do know about that small town drama king who's been riling up the poor throughout the countryside over the past three years, no doubt loving the attention and always seeking the limelight.

Hold on a minute Zeke, we have another reporter, Samuel Sensationalizer also coming to us live from the scene of where the riot began.

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): Yes Bridget, I'm here at the little town of Bethpage on the top of the Mount of Olives, where Jesus and several other radical anti-Roman groups began their march towards the city. I'm here with Lois Logistics a spokesperson with the Bethany - Bethpage Peace and Justice Coalition. Ms. Logistics, we know your group has called for the violent overthrow of the Roman installed government, what can you...

Lois Logistics (Cathy): Whoa, whoa, wait a minute! We have never called for violent revolution but for a non-violent end of the illegal and oppressive occupation by the Romans.

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): So, what is the particular role you are playing in today's riot?

Lois Logistics (Cathy): Well, Jesus asked us to procure two donkeys for him to use, not to start a riot, but as part of some street theater for today's peaceful march and protest. So, when these two dudes from his organization showed up and repeated the secret code we simply handed them the reigns and let Jesus do the rest.

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): So help me out a bit with this whole “street theater” thing, I don’t get it? All I saw was Jesus chasing after this young donkey, trying to ride it, only to get bucked off each time. And then the mother donkey started chasing Jesus trying to protect her baby?

Lois Logistics (Cathy): You’re kidding me right? Ever read any history? Maybe it has something to do with our Jewish history - that we’re not easily tamed, or like it’s time to throw off our oppressors again or that we are usually just downright stubborn most times when it comes to allowing oppressors to ride our backs! It’s time we do it again.

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): Oh?

Ezekiel Exaggeration (Steve): Sam, Ezekiel here again. It appears Jesus is still chasing that silly donkey and still trying to climb aboard, while the old mare is close behind nipping at his robes. Simply hilarious stuff, that Jesus is quite the entertainer! But on a more serious note I see some rioters in full combat gear. Sir, who you are and why are you here?

Apocalyptic Andy (JD): Huh? Just call me Apocalyptic Andy!

Ezekiel Exaggeration (Steve): I see a “Zealot Boys” patch on your fatigues. Isn’t that a group that according to the “fake news” media, not us, of course, but the other guys, are responsible for the murder of Jewish collaborators of the Roman regime. How does your participation today fit into the “fake news” portrayal of Jesus as peace activist and an advocate for non-violence?

Apocalyptic Andy (JD): Now we all know that that is just a handy gimmick for Jesus to raise buckets of denarii from the liberal elites and the celebrities in Caesaria. Anyway, haven’t you heard, Armageddon is a-comin’ baby! We’re just trying to help to get things started - grease the skids so to speak. It all needs to be burned to the ground and then start over! We’re just the spark! That’s why we oppose all kinds of gun control since we need all the weapons we can get so we’re ready to go when God calls us into action.

Ezekiel Exaggeration (Steve): Wait a minute, it appears that the Police line has disappeared and Jesus and the others have rushed into the area in front of the outer courtyard of the Temple where the bankers and merchants are located. Now for those listeners not familiar with the Temple complex, that is where pilgrims with foreign or damaged currency can exchange it for Temple approved coinage and also where various animals with the Temple’s seal of approval can be conveniently purchased for sacrificial purposes.

Then, further inside, there are the extraordinary plazas, where worshippers are segregated according to gender, country of origin and status for ritual bathing and the baptism with the blood of their sacrificed animals.

But wait, it appears that the intruders are now rampaging through the kiosks and market stalls, knocking over tables and ATMs and releasing the doves from their cages and untethering the

sheep, goats and... look out! Whoa, a couple bulls just went thundering by within inches of us! It's utter panic and chaos!

It appears as if Jesus and his gang are actually hauling the furniture and lumber away, likely to make a barricade no doubt... Or, wait a minute, it looks like they are actually clearing a pathway and sure enough, stretcher bearers are running folks up to where Jesus is now in one of the inner courtyards. And right behind them are folks with canes and walkers and also some blind folks being lead by the hand. And there are more folks joining them, folks whom it would appear are also impure and therefore ritually unacceptable like beggars, lepers, folks who have avoided ritual bathing for quite sometime, as well as some prostitutes and drug addicts. Oh my, the humanity of it all!

Everyone's mingling together now as the lame begin to walk, the blind claim to see and the poor are sharing in the food that was left for the priests.

Next to me right now is one of the bankers who managed to survive the maelstrom. Please tell me who you are and how this has affected you.

Unscrupulous Ursula (Cathy): I've lost everything, ruined, my entire world is turned upside down. My name is Unscrupulous Ursula, a partner, was a partner in, Greedy, Unscrupulous and Scheister Savings and Loan. We were providing an essential service for both the pilgrims and the Temple. The Priests in turn promised not to regulate us and to also protect our places of business.

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): Now we heard reports by some so called "news" outlets that your banks were charging outlandish service fees on the currency exchanges and that the cartel that controlled the selling of animals for sacrifice was also gouging their customers and that both were giving kick acks to the Temple priests?

Unscrupulous Ursula (Cathy): Lies spread by those commie socialists like Jesus, who believe that we can just give those lazy poor people everything they need, without making them work at unlivable wages for a living!

Samuel Sensationalizer (Steve): Okay, now it looks like some of the priests have come out of hiding to confront Jesus. Let me move in a bit closer to see if I can hear what they're saying. Boy are they angry hollering at Jesus to leave and to get his riff-raff out of the Temple! And Jesus is giving it right back, shouting back that it is they who have defiled God's sacred Temple, turning a place of prayer into a hideout for crooks who then actually prey upon the poor and the sick! Ouch! Oh that Jesus, always ready with a quick, pungent, pun!

Something's happening... it looks like Jesus has turned his back on the Temple leadership and is walking away, healing more folks as he slowly makes his way through the crowd that has filled the Jewish male only section of the plaza. It appears that he is leaving and some of his fellow rioters are going with him.

Paul the Pious (John): Attention, attention... this is Paul the Pious, spokesperson of the Temple's High Priest. All Temple Courtyards as well as all mercantile activity will be closed and suspended until further notice. We plan to restore order ASAP. But due to the extensive damage caused by the rampaging mobs and the extensive contamination by the entrance of those ritually impure it may take some time.

But be rest assured once we get it all cleaned, repaired and chase down all the missing livestock we will reestablish order and return to business as usual.

And as far as that leader of the insurrection, Jesus of Nazareth, well, we have ways to make certain that he will cause us no further trouble.

Ezekiel Exaggeration: Well Bridget, there you have it, back to you! Whew what a day here at the Temple Mount!

Bridget Bombshell (Cathy): Thanks Easy, I mean Zeke, um Ezekiel for that Breaking News, live update! We now return to our scheduled program still in progress.

Steve: And that my brothers and sisters is what so called "Palm Sunday" is really about! Amen?

Trailer Notes: No humans or animals were injured in this morning's dramatic retelling of the original Palm Sunday story.

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