

Disciples of the second triumphal entry

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First of all I want you to know that I know this is not Palm Sunday. But I believe that Holy week and Christmas are similar to Mother's Day. Just as it is always a goodtime to honour mothers whether it is that special hallmark day or not, it is also good to remember Scripture stories like these at other times in the year. Besides, this is such an exciting story and so full of encouragement and good stuff, no matter how hard and long we squeeze it, we will never get all the goodness from this fruit.

The story just read is only half the story. This story does not tell us about the other triumphal entry. In fact, you won't find reference to another triumphal entry anywhere in the Bible or in any histories of the time. Yet I am pretty sure there had to be one. That first triumphal entry puts this one in an even brighter spotlight, gives it even more weight and offers guidance and encouragement for communities of faith.

But before we get to the first event, let's concentrate on the one before us.

Jesus and his disciples were on the hill outside Jerusalem. They camped out of the city probably because, like Mary and Joseph, they would have found all the hotels booked up. This was Passover, the time of year when most Jews felt compelled to go to Jerusalem for the holiest of feasts on the calendar. People would spend large percentages of their wages and travel considerable distances to be in Jerusalem at Passover. It was like butterflies migrating thousands of mile to get to their "home" breeding grounds. Jerusalem was the sacred city ever since David established it as the capital and Solomon sealed its fate by building a beautiful Temple there. And the Feast of the Passover remembered the night when the Israelites were freed from slavery – the night the Angel of Death passed over the Israelites houses and struck the eldest son of all the

Egyptian homes. This is the highest of the high feast days. Greater than Purim, detailed in the Book of Esther, greater than the feast of booths, or Rosh Hashanah or any other of the many Jewish holidays. People flocked to Jerusalem, the capital city not only of the region, but of their faith.

The week leading up to Passover, then was a week for people to begin streaming into the city. It is believed that Jerusalem had a population of about 25,000 at that time. Estimates put the Passover crowd at an additional 100,000 or so. Which brings us to the reason for the first triumphal entry.

Several things are certain. In those days, 125,000 people in one place was a lot of people. The fervor and passion of this sacred celebration could easily boil over into anti-Roman sentiment with a little stirring of the pot. The Jews were not known for their restraint in matters concerning their religion and their freedom. The Maccabean rebellion was still fresh in history, when a band of brothers rallied the Jewish population and overthrew Roman rule for a time. Therefore, a strong military presence would have been necessary in order to assure that another rebellion did not take place.

Pontius Pilate was Procurator for the whole region. He was in control of keeping law and order and of deploying proper military forces to a troubled region in order to keep the peace. He represented Roman government and he enforced Roman law. He, like many Roman leaders, did not like staying in a dirty town like Jerusalem. He lived in his palatial estate in Caesarea, easily a day's journey northwest of Jerusalem. No doubt the view from his balcony included the Mediterranean and he had beach front property.

However, his position and power demanded that he, too, make a reluctant pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was important that he be seen entering the city in force so that the Jews would know that the heavy hand of Rome was set to strike down any troublemakers. Pilate's, then would have been

the first triumphal entry. Though we have no description of it, it makes sense that it would have been showy and grand, a real attention getter, with pomp and noise and bright shiny weaponry on display. It could have occurred within a week of Jesus triumphal entry.

Now picture the contrast between the two. Pilate may have come in on a magnificent horse decked out in battle armor. Jesus entered in dusty clothes on an ass, the foal of a donkey, a colt. Pilate was raised above the crowds. Jesus was riding at crowd level. Pilate was surrounded by elite Roman soldiers, his personal guard, selected and trained in combat. Jesus had a small gang of followers, fishermen, tax collectors, trades people who likely never ever carried weapons. There may have been music blaring to announce Pilates arrival. The crowd around Jesus provided their own music. The crowds may have felt compelled to wave and shout for Pilate in order not to be singled out. The crowd welcoming Jesus could not contain themselves. In fact they made so much noise that Caiaphas, the high priest complained.

Is it any wonder that the crowds gathered for the second triumphal entry. John tells us that some of the crowd had just been in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem, to witness Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They were excited to see Jesus enter Jerusalem in fulfillment of the ancient prophecy from Zechariah 9:9.

However, it would certainly not be lost on people how this second triumphal entry was a mockery of the first. Military might was confronted by a dusty grubby little carpenter. Armored troops were replaced by Jewish peasants. A young donkey colt replacing an armored warhorse. Palm branches instead of swords. Pilate would have come in through the northern gate. Jesus would have come in from Bethany, south of Jerusalem, symbolically opposing Pilates entry in just about every way possible.

Each entry displayed power, but while the power of the Romans was completely understood, the power Jesus brought was almost completely foreign.

We, then, are disciples of the second triumphal entry.

Emmaus Road is a small band of disciples who hold Jesus at the center of your lives. You have been and continue to be followers of Christ. In light of the second triumphal entry, there are some things to remember, not only for this group here, but for us all.

There is much to confront in these days that is evil. At home there is lack of health care, there is poverty and racism, violence and all manner of wrong and injustice. World wide the list is very, very long. The same could be said for what was happening at the time of the second triumphal entry. Jesus decided to make a scene that would give people hope and let them know there was another way. The second triumphal entry took not only courage, but imagination and timing. It was a fulfillment of prophecy, but it was so much more. Jesus once again confronted the principalities and powers and showed that a third way was possible.

We, as disciples of the second triumphal entry, are called to make an entrance of our own. We have grown up as the quiet in the land, but we are called to make a joyful noise, raised up against the principalities and powers of today. What if all of you showed up at the town hall in Berne during a meeting of the council, to give voice to the systems and rules that support injustice? What if you invited others from Berne to join you in Indianapolis? What if you invited the Mennonite churches in India to join you in a march to the capitol to demonstrate against unfair laws? What if you were called to begin a million Menno march on Washington, DC?

Don't laugh it off. Don't say "Oh, we aren't like that." The people at the second triumphal entry felt they had a leader they could believe in, someone who would lead them against the evil of their world. Jesus is still our leader, he is still out front. He still calls for us to cry out Hosanna.

He was Messiah then and he is Messiah now. I believe we are called to confront the Pilates and what they stand for. This story is our story.

You at Emmaus Mennonite Fellowship are here for a purpose. I know a bit of your journey and the pain and loss you are still dealing with. Jesus tells us that the journey will not always be fair or joyful. But it will, in the end, be worthwhile. You are on this journey because you are following Jesus. God has formed this community of faith for this time and for this place for a specific purpose. You have the power, the passion, the imagination and the courage. You have already demonstrated that. God has great things in store for you as you remain faithful to His call.

Pick one thing. Pray about it, discuss it, plan it and use your creativity and courage. It might be a personal change in attitude, it may be an act of kindness, healing, standing against an injustice or standing with a brother or sister in need. It may be a letter writing campaign, or a march, or a public prayer vigil. It might be noisy or it might be quiet. It will take imagination and it will take courage, because, like Jesus, we must make ourselves and where we stand known. Jesus calls us to do what he did at the second triumphal entry. He gave the people hope of a better future, hope that things can be changed, hope that God was still active and in charge. Some people misunderstood Jesus. Some people will misunderstand us.

A Christian writer and spiritual leader once said, “Never doubt that a small group of determined people can change things, in fact, it is the only thing that ever has.”

The world needs healing, the world needs hope. Whether it is in your homes, in your neighbourhood, in your state, in your country, or in the world, your small triumphal entry with Christ in the lead will do things you never dreamed of and might the beginning of something very, very big.