

“Shaking the City”

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Matthew 21:1-10

Rev. Lewis Galloway

March 29, 2026



The week begins with a parade into the city and ends with a procession to Calvary. The whole ministry of Jesus has been moving steadily toward this moment. What has been hidden will be revealed; what has been only partially understood will be brought to light. When he enters the city of Jerusalem on a donkey he proclaims his true identity - not with words but with symbolic action. The prophet Zechariah said that the Messianic King would come to Jerusalem on “a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The symbolic act portrays both his humility and the character of his kingship. According to tradition, a king rides a horse in a time of war, but a donkey in a time of peace.

The crowds, perceiving the significance of the moment, line the road with their cloaks; some place cut branches on the road as well. It is a first century red carpet entrance for Jesus into Jerusalem. Echoing the words of the 118th Psalm, the crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” The whole scene is infused with the expectation of the messianic hope of the Jewish people. The long-awaited Davidic King has come to break the yoke of the oppressor and set the people free.

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There is a whole lot of shouting going on! With all the noise, you would think it was a Duke Carolina basketball game or a Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. When the shouting dies down, students go back to their classes, folks go home for dinner, the confetti is cleaned up, and the streets are swept clean. Things go pretty much back to normal. Not so with the crowds that follow Jesus into Jerusalem. Things will never be the same. There is no returning to normal.

To say the city is simply stirred up does not capture the depth of Matthew’s intention. Something more is going on here than simply shaking our heads after reading the headlines over coffee at Starbucks and wondering what can happen next. Something more is happening here than a simple word of encouragement from a text message, a horoscope, or a fortune cookie. Matthew says that “the whole city was in turmoil.” The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem rocks our lives and shakes our world to its foundation. Jesus cracks open the city like a great earthquake. He begins a procession that leads from triumph to defeat and from defeat back to triumph. He moves from life to death and to life again. He begins the final battle for our lives and for the freedom he gives us to choose how we live each day.

I wonder if we have domesticated this scene and bridled its power so that it no longer speaks to us of the things that matter - like faith and courage, vision and commitment, death and

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life. The city’s question is put to us, “Who is this?” It is for us to decide for or against the answer buzzing through the crowds, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” In these few verses Jesus is called “Lord,” “King,” “Prophet,” and “Son of David.” He shakes the city to its foundation. He turns our world upside down.

I am not sure we want to have our lives turned upside down and shaken to the core. For good or ill, we are fairly content with the way things are. I am not sure we want to change our mode of operation. In T.S. Eliot’s play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, the women of Canterbury lament the human condition. The Archbishop Thomas has been away for seven years. The women ponder what their lives have been like during those past years. They say, “Seven years we have lived quietly, succeeded in avoiding notice, living and partly living. There have been oppression and luxury, there have been poverty and license, there has been minor injustice. Yet we have gone on living, living and partly living.”

Partly living. Is that enough? Is that what God intends for you and me? We have built our lives on a shaky foundation. As long as the wind does not blow too hard or the ground beneath us not tremble too much, we think we can withstand what life throws at us. We prefer the carefully calculated peace treaty we think we have made with Jesus to total surrender. How easy

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it is to fall into the trap of giving only when it feels good, worshiping when there is nothing better going on, praying only when something is needed, and serving when there will be some return on the investment. We may wear a tee shirt with a religious logo or drive a car with a license plate that reads, “In God we trust,” but that doesn’t mean that we have given serious thought to following Jesus. Jesus did not enter the city to die for our sins to make us half-hearted disciples who only give lip service to the gospel. Half-hearted disciples who only go on “living and partly living.”

Some years ago, a minister friend told me he was done. He had had enough. When I asked him what was going on, he told me. A young couple with elementary-aged children had visited the church and wanted to become members. At that time, it was his practice to make a personal visit with everyone who wanted to unite with the church. His goal was to get know them and share what a commitment to Christ and being a part of the church meant. Over the phone, they tried to find a time that would work for the family. Monday evening didn’t work because Mom had bridge game. Tuesday wasn’t any better because the kids had basketball practice. On Wednesday, Dad worked late. Thursday and Friday were out as well. Then the father said, “We have basketball games at the Y on Saturday. If you could meet us at the Y, we would have a chance to talk between games. So, he went and squeezed in a quick visit between

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games. When he left, he realized how angry he was. He was not angry with the family; he was angry with himself. “You know,” he said, “I think I left them with the impression that being committed to Jesus was just something you squeezed in between basketball games.”

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard severely criticized the established church in Denmark for reducing Christianity to practices that anyone could keep with little inconvenience to themselves. He criticized the church for its accommodation to culture, its conformity to middle class values, and its coziness with the state. He felt the church had abandoned the demanding and uncompromising teachings of Jesus about love. He longed for a return to an authentic, vital faith in Jesus Christ which would lead a believer to live out the hard claims of the gospel.

Kierkegaard believed that there were only two ways of looking at Jesus: to believe in him and accept him or to be offended by him and reject him. Kierkegaard understood how Jesus shakes the foundations.

This week we are invited to follow Jesus into Jerusalem. Even as he travels to the cross, he remains the only unshakable foundation in life. The Psalm we read this morning says, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22). He will be rejected, but he will become the new foundation. He shakes up the city and cracks open our

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lives to give us a new center, a solid place to stand. If we follow him, we do not have to cling so tightly to power, to money, or to privilege. We do not have to make sure we always have the advantage. We can let go of our need to control everyone and everything. We discover it is more important to love than to be right.

I like to imagine every one of us following Jesus into the city. When we follow Jesus, there is great freedom to see the world and other people through his eyes. We walk where he walked to places of need and pain. We sit down with people who just need someone to listen to their troubles. We enter a home to share bread and wine with folks who can't get out anymore. We renew our community by tearing down a crack house and creating a playground and a pre-school. We take time to study, to pray, and to worship. We turn off the TV, and actually talk to the people with whom we live. We discover there is life beyond our smart phones. Instead of being suspicious of those whose faith is different from our own, we build a house for a Muslim family. As we see how Jesus welcomes the glad shouts of children, we realize that all the children of this city are our children too. Suddenly, we care about what happens to them. We shop for groceries not only for ourselves, but also for our Nourish Up pantry to share with those who have no food to eat. We stop judging and start loving; we quit criticizing and begin

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encouraging; we cease wasting and commence giving. Following Jesus is a holy inconvenience.

We need a little inconvenience in our carefully plotted out lives.

Several of us from the church made a recent visit to one of our retirement communities to celebrate communion with some of the residents. In our “getting to know you” conversation before the communion service, one of the residents shared about her life growing up in a small town in South Carolina. Her dad was the country doctor. When he made house calls, he would often take her with him. If things seemed suitable, he would invite his young daughter to join him in the home. Other times she would stay in the car. After one house call, he came back to the car and said, “They don’t have any food in the house. We need to stop by the grocery store.” After another visit, he came back to the car and said, “They need the pastor more than they need me.” She learned about far more than “doctoring” in a small town and rural community. She learned about life. She learned from her father what it means to follow Jesus in every area of life and in everything you do. A lesson she has kept close to her heart these eighty years.

Yes, I can see all of us in that Palm Sunday parade. I can see us shouting and running, laughing and crying, repenting and rejoicing as we make our way to Jerusalem and beyond. We

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walk with Jesus because we know that Jesus walks with us all along our pilgrim journey. Jesus has shaken us to the very core of our being and given us a whole new foundation for life.