

SERMON: "THROWING A PARADE"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 118:1-2, 19-29
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 21:1-11

March 29, 2026
Palm / Passion Sunday

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

Last week I told you about the church I served as an interim pastor before being called here to share in ministry with you – about their Easter sunrise service I joked that I wasn't really thrilled about that (not an early bird), then rationalized that at least it wasn't a live nativity. That would be too much for me.

But what if it wasn't? Ok, maybe not a live nativity at Christmas.

The gospels don't really mention the animals there, but we can picture them there. We even add a few. Whose child was it that insisted on being a tiger in the manger for the Christmas play? Maybe he was going for the lion laying down with the lamb kind of vibe. A theologically astute youngster.

Ok, if not a nativity with sheep and camels and cows (and lions and lambs and tigers), How about a Palm Sunday re-enactment with the donkey? That would be easier, except when we use the Palm Sunday story from Matthew's gospel.

Then we'd need two animals – a donkey and a colt. Two animals. That is how Matthew tells the story ... with a donkey and a colt, plural

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."

I've missed this until reading the work of Catherine Sider Hamilton, a New Testament professor from the University of Toronto. She makes the point that Matthew, who quotes the Hebrew bible (as he does here) more than any other gospel writer, has two animals on purpose. She writes for Working Preacher

"Your king comes to you," just as Zechariah has said. And this king who comes on both the colt and the donkey of the blessing given long ago to Judah now enacts the promise to Judah as he enters Jerusalem. That ruler is here, now, Matthew is saying, in Jesus. Matthew makes the point again as Jesus rides into Jerusalem. The people shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Only in Matthew do they hail Jesus as Son of David. They are calling him king—the Davidic king, king in the line of Judah

WHO IS THIS?

Backing up a bit to Matthew as a whole. Remember this is the writer who began his work with a genealogy, chapter one. He wants his Jewish audience to know 'this the One we have been waiting for, this is the Davidic king. This is our king!' He wants to make that important connection to the past ... and make another important connection to the present and future. This king is going to be different.

This is a king you could picture on both a colt ... and a donkey
Let me highlight that this way. One of our church members who sits in the back regularly wears the gear and logo of his favorite team – the Indianapolis Colts.
Good logo, good choice for a team. Strong, regal. Think George Washington on a horse. Other sports teams (the Broncos) have horse names too

But donkeys? Any sports teams sporting a donkey logo?
Doesn't project quite the same power, does it? But Jesus on a donkey?
That makes sense! He is a humble servant. A donkey fits him
So too though does a colt. He is the long-awaited king. He fits both!

The imagery with two animals in the parade fits the larger question
It is the one the crowd asks at the end of the story, "Who is this?"
It is the question I've focused on in most previous sermons. That's my excuse for missing the second animal. But the two animals reinforce the question
Their presence both raises and answers the question, "who is this?"

Great question for us to consider, and not just for today ... every day
Who is this? Who is Jesus? Lots of possible good answers here
And not just answers we think of on our own but biblical pictures of who Jesus is.
What he said and did – teaching, healing, eating with outcasts, turning over tables, blessing children. Lots of good answers.

Can I suggest two answers worth walking around in?
They might be the Roman Numerals in an outline full of the stories of Jesus
I'm following Matthew's use of two animals here – a two-point outline

One is the Jesus we expect, the one we have been expecting
He is the Promised One, the Messiah. The king who will ride into town on a colt
The other is the Jesus who doesn't always fit into what we expected
The Jesus who pushes us beyond our boundaries and our certainties
The servant leader who rides into town on a donkey

This is both/and. Lot of that in the Christian faith.
Ours is a combo platter kind of faith. Law and grace, faith and works
This seems a good day to highlight the 'both/and' nature of the gospel.
It is Palm Sunday. Time to throw a parade for the coming king ... AND
It is Passion Sunday. The splendor of the parade does lead to a cross

BOTH / AND

Both / And. That is how God loves – with the power of a king. Our Lord
And with love made known not through muscle and might, strength or spectacle
But with love made known as a servant ... a suffering servant. Our Savior.
Jesus knew where the parade would lead him
We know where this parade leads. It leads to a cross.

That is where Jesus leads and how he leads. That is who he is
He tells us who he is. He shows us who he is.
He is both / and in so many ways. The most basic confession of faith
is that Jesus is our Lord and our Savior – both/and. We see both here
in both animals and in where the story goes from here

Palm Sunday is not the end of the story. Palm and Passion go together
Following Jesus isn't just about throwing a parade
Palm Sunday isn't the happy ending, not yet. That will come later
But only after Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion.

It's the preacher's job to put it simply 'take them (that's you) to the cross.'
You've probably noticed that. Yes. We walk around in circles with our
Palm Sunday processional. We do that at the beginning of the service
But the end of the service. We try to end where Jesus did
We are working and walking toward a day we dare call Good Friday

That is where Jesus is going with these two animals – a colt and a donkey
I wonder how that worked. Did he take turns riding them, a rotation worked out
by a committee following Robert's Rules of Order. How did the 'both/and' work?
Bigger picture, how does the 'both / and' or our faithful following work?

I'd suggest an idea / image. I'd suggest that following Jesus is a 'creative tension'
between two or more good things like law and grace, faith and works,
keeping silence and speaking up ... colts and donkeys, show horses and workhorses.
And if that is still too many words, how about faith as a color – the color grey?

Might I be so bold as to encourage you to embrace the grey of following Jesus?
I've been trying to downsize and pack for our move to NC this summer
I came across this packed away in our basement. We had it in storage

Show image – "Peace – Burial at Sea"

This is "Peace – Burial and Sea" by JMW Turner. He was a British painter
whose work in many ways would be a precursor for the French Impressionists

The thing that draws me to Turner is how his paintings, at least to me,
blend together the many varieties of the one or two colors you see the most, often
blues and greys (British weather I guess) with the splash of color somewhere else
in the frame. It speaks to my soul ... the way he blends dark and light.
Distinct but together. Each catches your eye, somehow highlighting the other.

SUMMARY

That blending together of dark and light, that mix of greys,
I would suggest is the journey / adventure of following Jesus
who is both our Lord and our Savior.

Following Jesus is not simple. There are versions of Christianity, rather powerful
versions of Christianity (fundamentalism, legalism, Christian nationalism,) that preach simplicity. They are right. Anyone else, everyone else is wrong.

I'm afraid that "my way or the highway" simplification of the gospel is not only
biblically and theologically distorted ... it is dangerous. It just seems to ignore
(on purpose in all likelihood) Jesus' humility, the Jesus riding a donkey.

I know there are times and places for either/or instead of both/and
I know there are times where one has to be for or against
But even in those cases there can be some nuance.

An example for times of war, especially a war like the one in the Middle East
when there has been no address to the nation to explain the why of the war
(as has been the case in previous modern wars). A moral stance can be
Both against a war of choice and at the same time supportive of those
who have been called to serve, praying for them and their safe return.

Both / and is not being weak or wishy washy
It is recognizing the grey, seeing it, appreciating it
Embracing the grey means following the Jesus we expect
And the Jesus who so often leads into the unexpected
so often stretching our answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?"

So to close ... maybe you can help me with something
Still trying to downsize and pack (anybody interested in buying a snowblower?)
I need to take that Turner print, with all those greys, and do something with it
I'm thinking of taking it to NC and finding a home for it (not in storage)

Or I might leave it in the pastor's study
You've probably picked up on the truth that I've been encouraging you
for the past almost dozen years to enter into and embrace the greys
I just might leave a little Turner blend of grey with you to keep encouraging you
to step out further and further into the adventure of following Jesus

He's on the loose, you know!