

## **The Good News Is ... Inspiring Us to Action**

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,  
on Palm Sunday, March 29, 2026, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scripture: [Mark 11:1-11](#)

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All four gospels tell about the final days of Jesus' life, and they all start their narrative of Jesus' final days with a story about Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. Six of Mark's 16 chapters (about one-third of the book) are devoted to the eight days from what we now call "Palm Sunday" to "Easter." Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell essentially the same story. John version of the story is decidedly different from the other three, and there are minor differences between Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's versions.

For years, I thought Jesus' so-called "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem was a celebratory parade. I thought what was important about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was the shift in the crowd's attitude – from praising Jesus on Sunday to calling for his execution on Friday morning. That's how I heard it talked about and it didn't occur to me that there might have been two crowds, one made up of Jesus-followers we read about today, and one made up of people following the political and social elites, the oligarchs of Jerusalem, we read about on Friday.

My big shift came a few years after the 2006 publication of *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. They invite us to imagine two processions entering Jerusalem "on a spring day in the year 30.... One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mouth of Olives, cheered by his followers.... On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers."<sup>1</sup>

They go on: "What we often call the triumphal entry was actually an anti-imperial, anti-triumphal one, a deliberate lampoon of the conquering emperor entering a city on horseback through gates opened in abject submission."<sup>2</sup> I think this is a powerful insight, though I don't think "lampooning" is quite the right word. I don't think Jesus' procession was played for laughs. It was serious nonviolent direct action. If there was a thread of mockery in Jesus' procession, that comes from the observer who can see the difference. I think Jesus' procession was a show of power, calling into question where power truly lies.

I used to read the story about the disciples being sent to get the donkey colt for Jesus to ride as being about Jesus' divinity, that he knew they'd find the donkey because he was God incarnate. Now I see it as sign that all of this was a carefully planned bit of political street theater. When Jesus tells the disciples, "This is what you need to say when you get the donkey so the person who's letting us borrow it knows you are with us," he's giving them the password, the secret code.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

We heard Mark's version of the story today, so let's look a little more closely at it. Jesus is a grownup at the beginning of Mark's gospel. There's no birth narrative, and Mark makes no effort to connect Jesus to King David. For the past 10 chapters, Jesus has been telling anyone who will listen to him – more in action than in word – about “the empire of God.” Here he comes, riding a donkey, a donkey colt. Shane Claiborne says, “Imagine the president riding a unicycle in the Fourth of July parade. Kings did not ride donkeys. They rode mighty war horses accompanied by an entourage of soldiers. So here is Jesus making a spectacle of violence and power, riding in on the back of an ass.”<sup>3</sup>

That's what makes the words the crowd shouts so sad. When they shout, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” they're shouting for a replacement of the Empire of Rome with the Empire of Israel, while Jesus has been calling for the creation of the Empire of God. The crowd wants an insurrection; Jesus wants the transformative power of nonviolent love.

Luckily, for you and for me, Jesus presses on. And he invites us to join him.



That's what yesterday's No Kings rally here in Fremont felt like to me: Joining Jesus' parade. Applying the transformative power of nonviolent love.

One might ask how a gathering of a bunch of people in Fremont can transform our country. By itself, I'm not sure it can. Still, look to what a difference one little parade 2,000 years ago made. And there were over 3,000 marches and rallies and protests that took place yesterday.

One of them was in Belchertown, a little town in central Massachusetts of about 15,000 people. It was 31°F in Belchertown, yesterday morning and they still had a crowd of about 200. This is my dad and my two sisters at the No Kings Rally there.

Scenes like that, large gatherings with thousands, and small gatherings with dozens, happened all across the country. And many of us showed up because we follow the Prince of Peace whose good news inspires us to act. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Shane Clairborne in a Facebook post, <https://www.facebook.com/ShaneClaiborne/posts/pfbid029iQ8WE5HbFPNQ9JAD9Rm42hM2oVFvtwQuyEb p3xpA5uTSPsYxu7k6AN9BXLjBksjl> (posted 9 April 2022; accessed 27 March 2026).