

Title: Come Alive – Above and Beyond
Date: March 25, 2018
Subject: Jesus brings the kingdom of God to people
Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Some of the happiest people the weeks prior to the Philadelphia Eagles Super Bowl victory were the bakers in the city of brotherly love. Their beloved Crisco would be available in stores and at its customary price. Their concern stemmed from what authorities had done before the NFC Championship game. In an attempt to prevent exuberant fans from climbing street poles, teams of city workers scurried around with cans of Crisco to apply the shortening to the poles. The Philly police, tongue firmly planted in cheek, expressed concern for the health of celebrators by going on social media to warn people about the dangers of saturated fats. Fans still found ways to scale the Crisco covered poles. Different preparations were adopted for possible Super Bowl celebrations. Workers applied a substance engineered for greater resistance in extreme weather condition – hydraulic fluid. Didn't see if it kept the rowdies off the poles.

Things were quite a bit tamer and more subdued when Jesus entered Jerusalem on his Triumphal Entry. There's no record of people climbing street poles -- especially since there weren't any. They may have climbed trees to get branches to lay on the road as Jesus passed, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Jesus had frequently laid out the blueprint of his death, burial, resurrection, ascension and eventual return (Luke 5:35; 9:22; 9:43-45; 12:50; 13:32-33; 18:32; and others). When the religious leaders demanded Jesus give them a sign he told them the only sign they'd get would be that of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-40). "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Jesus said he was going to die but come back to life.

Most of Christ's foretellings were given to the disciples. Just a few days prior to the Triumphal entrance he gave a powerful description of the impending events.

READ Matthew 20:17-19. Luke's account adds "everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled" (Luke 18:31).

Jesus knew what was in store. It wasn't just a vague gnawing at his gut that something bad was coming. He was fully aware of the details of his death – mocked, flogged, spit on, insulted and killed on a cross. As we saw in Hebrews -- he endured the cross, scorning its shame for the joy set before him (Hebrews 12:2), the joy of pleasing his Father and being reunited with him.

Though it was with heavy heart, he deliberately made his last trip to Jerusalem. The mood was dampened as the disciples squabbled about who was the greatest and have the seats of authority in the kingdom. It was fueled by the request of the mother of James and John. Jesus used the incident to remind his followers that he didn't "come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

The journey took the Savior through Jericho. It was there he healed some blind men (Mathew 20:29-34). The crowd had told them to "Hush up. Jesus doesn't want to bother with the likes of you." Jesus stopped. He asked the blind men what they wanted. Even though it was obvious, they had to express faith. He healed the men and they followed him. The crowd? They praised God. "We knew Jesus would heal them. That's the kind of person he is. Praise the Lord!" Getting a taste of the fickle and superficial nature of the crowd.

While in Jericho he encountered a tree hugger, more accurately, a tree climber by the name of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). He wanted to see Jesus but couldn't because had a height disadvantage. He was short. Solution? Go climb a tree. Jesus saw him and invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for supper. The wealthy chief tax collector not only shared a meal with Jesus but gave his heart to the Lord. Jesus pronounced that salvation had come to this man and his house. The crowd? The pendulum swung the other way. They muttered and shook their heads that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a "sinner." "Oh that Jesus. He'll hang out with anybody. Not so sure about him."

Apparently, there was a large group at Zacchaeus' house. They started putting two and two together. They thought that since Jesus was present and they were close to Jerusalem, the kingdom of God must be going to appear at once (Luke 19:11). Jesus used the occasion to tell a parable about a man who was going to another country to be appointed king and then return. He gave money to his servants and told them to put it to work until he comes back. He was telling them the kingdom would come after he went away.

The time for Jesus to make the Triumphal Entry was drawing close. People speculated if he was coming to the Passover Feast or if he might skip it (John 11:56). The religious leaders caught wind of the mounting enthusiasm for Jesus. They put the word out that Jesus was a wanted man. Anyone who had any information should get it to them ASAP.

The alert heightened six days before the Passover when Jesus arrived at Bethany, two miles from the heart of Jerusalem. He stayed with his good friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. People flocked to see Jesus and Lazarus. It wasn't everyday one could see someone who was raised from the dead. The chief priests upped their end game. They now included Lazarus on the kill list as people were putting their faith in Christ because of him. Again, it isn't every day that you see a once dead man walking around as if nothing had happened.

The fateful day arrived. Jesus began walking from Bethany. He came to Bethphage which was a little over a half mile from Jerusalem. It was there the true preparations for his entrance took shape.

READ Matthew 21:1-11.

All the familiar elements are there – the donkey, palm branches being placed on the road, people excitedly cheering “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38). “Blessed is the king of Israel!” (John 12:13). Some of the religious told Jesus that his followers were too noisy. Jesus silenced his critics by telling them that if the crowd kept quiet, the stones will cry out his praises (Luke 19:40).

Jesus was the one who orchestrated the scenario. It wasn't that the crowds suddenly came up with the idea that Jesus should be hailed as king. He deliberately presented himself as the king, the gentle king riding on a donkey. The crowd's expectations were incomplete and inadequate. They thought they could install him as their political leader and get rid of Roman oppression.

But the king didn't come to act in their prescribed manner. He pulled a switcheroo. Imagine a family loading in their car because they're going to get ice cream. The kids can almost taste the refreshing treat. But, surprise! Dad drives right past the ice cream shop all the way to the airport. They board a plane for Disney World or Paris! They're on a trip of a lifetime. The kids should be overjoyed but instead they're bummed. They were so looking forward to ice cream and now they have to on this trip. It just wasn't what they expected. It didn't fit their idea of what should happen. Didn't enjoy the vacation.

The crowd would soon discover that this king wasn't what they expected. He wasn't here to set up an earthly, political kingdom. Instead, He went above and beyond what the people imagined. He was a spiritual king, not an earthly one. And His victory—the ultimate victory over sin and death—would be more than freedom from their current oppression. It would be the victory that restored all of creation and made a way for every person to have a right relationship with God. He would defeat the oppression of their souls. The only thing people had to do was place their trust in this king.

The religious leaders weren't impressed either. They were petrified by the scene of the adoring crowd and the response to Jesus and the spreading of the news that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. They grew worried that their plan of capturing Jesus and removing him from the spiritual landscape was going nowhere fast. It seemed to them that the whole world had gone crazy after him (John 12:19).

Even the disciples didn't get it when the Triumphal Entry happened. I'm sure it had to blow their minds to hear people praising Jesus and expressing their expectation of a present King. They may have felt that the things Jesus had said about him dying, etc., wouldn't take place. It wasn't until after Jesus had risen from the dead that the disciples understood their role in presenting the king on that day (John 12:16).

You don't tell a king how to act and you definitely don't tell the King of kings how to act. He didn't come to become king at the moment. He had much bigger things in mind. He didn't ride a majestic white stallion charging into Jerusalem as the conquering hero, demonstrating his position of power, strength, and authority. He came on a donkey showing a king in his humility, offering peace, putting a spiritual emphasis on the entrance. He acted out of obedience to the Father and the plan that had been formed before the creation of the world. God knew that people would need someone, a perfect someone to deliver them from their sins and bring them into right relationship with himself. Jesus took center stage to let people know that his kingdom would not be limited to this earth but would reverberate throughout the universe.

In a couple days Jesus would tell a parable of the landowner who planted a vineyard and sent his servants and finally his son to collect what the tenants owed him. The tenants refused to pay. They mistreated and killed some of the servants and even killed the son. Jesus quoted the Scripture about the stone the builders rejected becoming the capstone. Then he told the religious leaders point blank that the kingdom would be taken away from them and given to people who will produce its fruit (Matthew 21:43). They got the message that Jesus was talking about them. Sharp guys. They wanted to kill Jesus even more.

There's another sad note to Jesus' Triumphal Entry. The crowds joyfully praise God as they shout and wave their palm branches. Jesus rides in on the donkey. Maybe it took place as the road negotiated a turn and there before Jesus lay the city. He'd seen it numerous times. This time was different. This time, when he saw the city, he wept over it. He said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). The New Living Translation, "How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late." Jesus wept over the lack of true faith.

Some irony in Christ's comment as Jerusalem, the "city of peace," was unwilling to receive the King of Peace. Jesus knows the value of souls and knows what happens to those who are stubbornly unrepentant. People closed their eyes to the truth that was lying in front of them. They could not get themselves to believe. Instead they chose to reject him.

Jesus came not to meet people's expectations but to exceed them and blow them out of the water. Many of the people during Jesus' life were content to have a political kingdom. Jesus came to bring a kingdom of a different dimension, a spiritual kingdom which will eventually include a spatial component but is of a nature that supersedes a one dimensional realm.

Jesus' entrance on that day was a courageous act as he was a wanted man. The religious leaders had placed a bounty on his head. He would be riding right into the enemy's stronghold. But the story isn't merely a profile in courage.

Jesus's life purpose and his death purpose was to bring God's love and life to the world. His love bridged the gap and provided a way for us to cross over into the holy presence of the God of the universe, to know Him and relate with Him. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:12 (NIV) "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

Imagine being color blind, unable to see the vivid colors that most take for granted. Then the blah world suddenly transformed into bright reds, greens, and blues. A new kind of lens is making this possible. One grandfather saw vibrant color for the first time in 70 years—and broke down in tears. A boy, age 10, put on a pair of the glasses and immediately his face lit up in amazement and he began to dance. After several speechless moments, he calmed down enough to comment, "This is the day that changed my life!"

Jesus had told the people that he would change the life of anyone who came to him. He said that it would happen when he was lifted up, crucified (John 12:32). People didn't understand. He told them they would be overcome by darkness because of their refusal to believe even though he offered light. Jesus even did many miraculous signs in their presence but it didn't make any difference. People refused to believe.

Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:44, 45).

Jacob DeShazer was part of the Doolittle Raid that retaliated against Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Since medium bombers couldn't land on carriers the 16 crews had been instructed to make their bombing run, fly on to China where hopefully Chinese peasants could help them evade capture and be rescued. Only 8 were captured. DeShazer was one of them. He languished in a prisoner camp for over three years, enduring torture, disease and abuse. One thing that kept him and his fellow prisoners going was the Bible. He had to wait 6 months for his turn to read it. After the war he returned home and in a few years returned to Japan to tell people how they could know Christ. A leaflet was made about how DeShazer had forgiven his Japanese captors for the inhumane treatment he'd received and that he was back in Japan. It was widely distributed. Mitsuo Fuchida was one of those who read the story. He then purchased a New Testament, read it, and accepted Christ as his Savior. He would later travel with DeShazer to talk about Christ. By the way, Fuchida was the flight commander of the planes that attacked Pearl Harbor.

Jesus came to do above and beyond what can ask, think or imagine. This is our hope. Hope is more than the eternal optimist of coach Charlie Brown that this year they are going to win a game. Hope is more than fingers crossed tightly that we're going to be done with winter soon. Hope is taking God as able to deliver on his promise of bringing us to his everlasting kingdom.

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Priorities

Charlie Brown and the gang were playing baseball. The ball is hit to Lucy and if she catches it they win the game. Charlie, "Catch it, Lucy...Please catch it...Please. Please. Please." The ball lands right beside her. Charlie, "Aaugh. I can't stand it! What kind of outfielders are you?! That ball only missed you by a foot!! Can't you see? What were you thinking about? What's wrong with you?! You're getting worse all the time! What do you want them to do, come out here and hand you the ball? What in the world made you miss that one?!" Lucy, "I was having my quiet time."

Some things are more important than sports.

Maybe say right thing wrong time.

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A minister once asked a G.I. to give a few words of testimony. The congregation had just sung, "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God," so when the young soldier arose he said, "You might have been able to sing that hymn some years ago without anyone challenging you, but now millions of men know exactly how an army does move. And it doesn't operate the way a lot of you do. Suppose the military accepted the lame excuses you present as an alibi for not attending services. Imagine this if you can. Reveille sounds, and the squads form on parade ground. The Sergeant barks out, 'Count off! One, two, three ... say, number four is missing. Where's Private Smith?' 'Oh,' says a chap nearby, 'Mr. Smith was too sleepy to get up this morning. He was out late last night and needed the rest. He said to tell you he would be with you in spirit.' 'That's fine,' says the sergeant, 'remember me to him. But where is Brown?' 'Oh, he's playing golf. He gets only one day a week for recreation, and you know how important that is.' 'Sure, sure,' says the sergeant cheerfully, 'I hope he has a good game. Where's Robinson?' 'Robinson,' explains the buddy, 'is sorry not to greet you in person but he is entertaining guests today. Besides, he was at drill last week.' 'Thank you,' says the sergeant smiling. 'Tell him he is welcome any time he finds it convenient to drop in for drill.' Honestly, folks, did a conversation like that ever happen in any army? Why, if any G.I. tried to pull that stuff, he would get twenty days in the brig! Yet you hear things like that every week in church. 'Like a mighty army!' Why, if this church really moved like a mighty army, a lot of folks would be court-martialed within the hour!"

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Few thinkers have exerted so pervasive an influence as Sigmund Freud. Although he claimed to be an atheist, he continually speculated about religious issues as if subconsciously haunted by the God whom he denied. When Freud turned 35, his father sent him a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures he had given to him when he was a boy. Sigmund had read and studied the book, at least for a while. Enclosed in that worn copy of the Scriptures was a note from the elder Freud reminding his son that “the Spirit of the Lord began to move you and spoke within you: ‘Go read in My Book that I’ve written and there will burst open for you the wellsprings of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom.’” His father expressed the hope that Sigmund might, as a mature man, once again read and obey God’s law. We have no evidence, however, that Freud took to heart his father’s exhortation. How different his life and influence might have been if he had!

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12 Christian Father's Day Quotes to Share With Dad

- "A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society." -- Billy Graham, Evangelist and Author
- "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother."
- "I was raised in the greatest of homes ... just a really great dad, and I miss him so much ... he was a good man, a real simple man ... Very faithful, always loved my mom, always provided for the kids, and just a lot of fun. -- Max Lucado, Author
- "Train up a child in the way he should go – but be sure you go that way yourself." -- Charles Spurgeon, 19th Century British Preacher and Theologian
- "A man ought to live so that everybody knows he is a Christian ... and most of all, his family ought to know." --Dwight L. Moody, 19th Century American Evangelist
- "My father didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it." -- Clarence Budington Kelland, U.S. Writer
- "How true Daddy's words were when he said: 'All children must look after their own upbringing.' Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands." -- Anne Frank, German Jew and Holocaust Victim
- "It is much easier to become a father than to be one." -- Kent Nerburn, U.S. Author and Educator

- "Blessed indeed is the man who hears many gentle voices call him father!" -- Lydia M. Child, U.S. Author
- "We are given children to test us and make us more spiritual." -- George Will, U.S. Journalist
- "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him." -- Psalm 103:13 (NLT)
- "The father of godly children has cause for joy. What a pleasure to have children who are wise." -- Proverbs 23:24 (NLT)