
**The Final Week: A Humble Donkey, A Towel and Basin – A Servant Leader
A Message from
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Grace and peace to you from the Lord whose victory over death has set us free.

It is the final week of Jesus' journey to the cross. It is the holiest of weeks for every follower of Christ.

Jesus is poised to enter Jerusalem for the very last time. It is a moment filled with fragile possibility. The thought of what might be, exhilarated the rag-tag band of fishermen, tax collectors, Samaritans, prostitutes, blind men, cripples, demoniacs, and zealots who followed Jesus.

- Might this be the King who would deliver them from the Romans?
- Might this be the Messiah who would usher in the promised Day of the Lord?
- Might this be the Savior who would gather all the children of God who had been scattered abroad?

This is the moment on which the wheel of history would turn. Either God's kingdom would be established on earth, or the people's hopes would be forever shattered.

No wonder the people began to sing and shout and praise God for all the deeds of power they had seen; for all the blessings they anticipated; for all the hope that swelled in their hearts. No wonder the people began to wave palm branches and lay down their cloaks. They somehow understood this was a defining moment in their history. They were ready to celebrate! They were ready to party! They were ready for a parade! Their king was coming! Their king was coming!

Entrance processions were a familiar ceremony during the time of Jesus. Many anointed kings and conquering generals had entered Jerusalem over the years with people singing their praises and acknowledging their authority by the spreading of cloaks and palm

branches on the road. They entered to take possession of the city, and they entered as royalty riding on war horses.

But in the Gospel, something is always out of place. In the Gospel, something is always turned upside down. The king is entering the city riding on a borrowed donkey, an animal of humility. Jesus is coming to take possession of the hearts of God's people riding on a humble donkey. This Jesus who comes seated on a donkey is a sign of contradictions and inversion. This Jesus is a threat to the God whom we have made over in our image – a God of high achievement and performance, a God of exclusivity and privilege. Jesus as a humble Messiah riding on a donkey with a rag-tag band of disciples unnerves and disturbs us. It is not what we expect. It is not what we often desire. Jesus enters into the final week of his journey to the cross, not controlled by power, but motivated by servanthood and sustained by obedience of the Father's will.

Jesus' entire journey toward Jerusalem and death on a Roman cross was one of servant leadership. Jesus drove this point home when he washed his disciples' feet during the Last Supper on the night before his death. With this act, Jesus taught his disciples in the Upper Room, and every disciple since,

- about his true mission,
- about what kind of King he truly was,
- about the true nature of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was teaching his disciples and us about servanthood.

The re-enactment and remembering of his act of servanthood was common in the early Christian Church. Even today, foot washing is observed as a sacrament in some Christian communities. In The United Methodist Church, the towel and basin are symbols of diakonia, or the ministry of service.

This Holy Week is an appropriate time to reflect on and embrace Jesus' model of servanthood. I invite you to take up the basin and towel. I encourage you to become a towel-and-basin disciple of Jesus.

I urge you to practice the "sacrament" of servanthood that all the world might know the transforming love of Christ.

I pray that this final week of Jesus' journey to the cross – this week of servanthood, suffering and sacrifice – will be a most Holy Week. I pray that this will be a week of preparation and anticipation of the Easter celebration. I pray that this will be a week in which you will remember and celebrate that love has conquered hate, grace has conquered sin, hope has conquered despair, and life has conquered death. Love, grace, hope, life – these have the final word because of Christ's resurrection.

Christ is Risen!
This is our defining story and reality as Christians.
Christ is Risen, indeed!
Thanks be to God.
Happy Easter!

