

THE POLITICS OF PALM SUNDAY

Ancient Roman politics was essentially like the politics of every other nation of that era, influencing other people through power, coercion, and violence. Rome was spreading the *Pax Romana* and genuinely believed that meant spreading peace. However, its method for spreading peace was actually violence.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus revealed an alternative way of being political. A political ruler's entry into a city was of great importance in the ancient world; Roman rulers would enter a city on a war horse to show power and domination. Jesus, on the other hand, rode in on a donkey as those in the gathered crowd spread their cloaks on the ground and waved their palm branches as they shouted, "Hossana to the Son of David." The *Jewish Annotated New Testament* states that the cloaks and palm branches were meant "to connect Jesus to the kingship of Israel" and the term "Son of David" was a clear messianic reference to a hope for a new political ruler.

Jesus was a different kind of king and the Kingdom of Heaven is a different kind of politics. For Jesus, Heaven is not some place off in the distance where you go after you die, but a way of life to be lived right here, right now. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he was revealing that the reign of God is in stark contrast to the reign of Rome. Jesus witnesses to the politics of humility and service, identifying structural injustice and a love that embraces all people, especially those we call our enemies.

So how do we, the followers of Jesus follow his model? By loving those in need, especially those whom society regards with suspicion. When we show love to the transgendered community, those returning home from incarceration, and immigrants without proper documentation (just for a few examples), we are engaging in Jesus's politics.

Advocating for Jesus's politics instead of state politics is another way we can follow Jesus's model. This is accomplished by talking with friends and neighbors about Jesus's love for all, standing up when you hear comments that harm, and listening to people with whom you disagree to find points of agreement. This engagement helps to promote the Kingdom of Heaven.

Perhaps your community or congregation could use this covenant together to engage in Jesus's politics of love:

"While interacting with members of my own faith, ethnic, or gender community, or with friends, family, or stranger, if I hear hateful comments from anyone about members of other communities, I pledge to stand up for the other and challenge bigotry and intolerance in any form."