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At the beginning of Lent this year on Ash Wednesday, we thought about two ideas. First, to try what some call the 30-day challenge, though I revised the idea as a 40-day Lenten challenge. The idea was to add to your life something that you've thought about trying, like a hobby, habit, artistic expression, or anything that captures your imagination. Instead of trying an overwhelming New Year's resolution, the season of Lent offers us a shorter time period to try something new. I'm curious if anyone tried the idea. If so, send me a text or email or tell me your experience at the end of worship.

For my Lenten challenge, I decided to practice some form of physical activity every day, which could include yoga, working in the yard, running outside, walking the dogs, or using my stationary bike in the basement. I missed a few days here and there, and I had a few days when I just didn't feel like it, but overall, I found myself feeling better with the increased physical activity. Making changes isn't always easy, even good changes, but this day, Palm

Sunday, reminds us of great changes that Jesus made...but wait, I'm getting ahead of myself.

The second idea we pondered at the beginning of Lent was the story of Jesus welcoming the children as he said:

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

I suggested we could return to those basic things we learned in childhood: be nice, say thank you, be fair, be prepared, and help one another. These basic teachings we saw reflected in the parables of Jesus the past five weeks in what Jesus called the kingdom of heaven, giving us a glimpse of what it's like living in God's place. It's more than a vision of what comes later, for Jesus often suggested that the kingdom of heaven is happening right now, here among us.

And now here we are, nearing the end of Lent, preparing for a Holy Week of remembering the last events of Jesus' life. It's a week that began with a

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parade, with a joyous entrance into Jerusalem but ended with Jesus dying on a cross. It's a time when many of us would like to go from the parade of Palm Sunday to the resurrection of Easter without the Good Friday suffering on the cross.

Isn't that how most of us prefer our lives to go? We want the celebrations, but we would rather avoid the struggles of life. Even though we know turmoil is an integral part of life, we sometimes try to pretend it won't affect us, that we can go from the parade to the resurrection without stopping for the pain in between.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the crowds gathered and waved palm branches, a symbol of royalty and honor. They spread their coats on the ground, a tradition used in welcoming a king as others had done generations before them. But his entrance involved a bit of a twist, for rather than riding into town on a war horse, like a military leader, he came into town on an ordinary donkey, an unpredictable animal that sometimes has a mind of its own. Maybe he wanted to convey a message—that he's not like the leaders

who have entered town before him...that his life would not follow the predictable path that others have walked.

Nothing about the life of Jesus had been ordinary up to then, for he ate with outcasts and tax collectors and sinners. He healed those who were possessed by physical, mental, and emotional turmoil. He challenged the views of religious leaders and spoke in parables that left some listeners confused.

In a sense, he didn't mind his manners; he upset the status quo, for this day of Palm Sunday reminds us of the changes he made. While many expected the Messiah to be a military leader who would amass an army and lead them to freedom, Jesus had another way of creating peace. He knew that violence only propagated more violence, and so he entered town on a humble donkey.

But as he entered the temple, he invited others to mind their manners through an unconventional act of turning over the tables of the merchants and moneychangers, but to hear that story we'll need to once again visit our imaginary reporter on location in Jerusalem.

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Doug (*using handheld mic*): This is Pastor Doug once again with WPBA, “Parables Brought Alive,” and this week we’re on location in Jerusalem, though this time we’re not investigating a parable, for actual events in Jerusalem have interrupted our original broadcast. While my last few interviews have helped bring the parables of Jesus to life, this week we’ve had some very troubling news, beginning with a crowd that gathered when the one known as Jesus came riding into town a donkey. Right now I’m at the temple, where Jesus seems to be making quite a ruckus. Let’s see if we can find out what’s going on. Excuse me, can you tell me what’s happening?

Guest: It’s been crazy here today. After riding into town, Jesus came into the temple and began overturning the merchant’s tables. The merchants were selling animals, so Jesus has really upset the temple economy.

Doug: Why were merchants even selling animals in the temple?

Guest: The animals are used for sacrifices, as a way of making an offering to God. Some sacrifices

seek God’s forgiveness from our sins and guilt. Others express our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives.

Doug: In particular, I heard that Jesus seemed upset with those selling doves and overturned their tables.

Guest: That’s right. Those who could not afford a grand sacrifice of a larger animal could buy a small dove. The poor and single women mostly bought these animals.

Doug: I wonder why Jesus would be upset with the selling of doves?

Guest: Probably because the merchants were selling the doves at an inflated price. They knew the poor could not afford the larger animals and had no other options for sacrifices, so the merchants inflated the price of the doves.

Doug: I also heard that Jesus overturned the tables of those exchanging money. Why would he do such a thing?

Guest: People from many nations came to the temple, and in order to have a common currency, they had to exchange their foreign

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money into temple money. It could be that Jesus is upset with their excessive exchange rates, or he could be upset they are taking up so much space in the area of the temple in which the outsider Gentiles can visit. Visitors might get the wrong impression of the temple, seeing it looking more like a shopping mall than a place of prayer and worship.

Doug: I understand that before he came to the temple, Jesus rode into town on a donkey and lots of people greeted him.

Guest: Yes, as he rode into town, many were waving branches cut from palm trees or spreading their coats on the ground.

Doug: That seems like an odd thing to do.

Guest: Oh, not at all. Palm branches represent hope and liberation, and when we spread coats on the ground, it reminded me of the time people welcomed King Jehu after he was secretly anointed as king of our people many generations ago.

Doug: If Jesus was entering as a king, it's odd that he came on a donkey rather than a warhorse.

Guest: I hadn't thought of that, but maybe he's trying to tell us he's a different kind of king. Rather than a king of war, he represents something different. Maybe even a king who brings peace!

Doug: That could very well be. A king of peace. A king who doesn't tolerate an economic system that takes advantage of people. A king who invites us to mind our manners, yet another reminder of the basics we've learned as children. The past six weeks that seems to be a reoccurring theme—following the basics we've learned in our childhood: Be nice, say thank you and please, play fair, be prepared, help one another, and mind your manners. May these teachings fill your lives with hope this Holy Week.

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