

# YOU'RE WELCOME

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April 14, 2019

Palm Sunday

[Luke 19:28-40](#)

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(prayer)

Today is Palm Sunday: one week before Easter Sunday.

You may know that the date of Easter varies from year to year because it is based on the relationship between the date of the March equinox and the timing of the full moon.

Although the astronomical date of the equinox can occur anytime between March 20th and 22nd, the equinox for ecclesiastical purposes is always March 21st.

Basically, on the (commonly used) Gregorian calendar, Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21.

For the parts of the world that use the Julian calendar, March 21st, currently, occurs thirteen days later (April 3rd on *our* calendars). So, Julian Easter can be different than Gregorian Easter.

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The Christian celebration of Easter is somewhat tied to the Jewish celebration of Passover, which is also a *movable feast*,

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Since hebrew calendars are lunar based - as opposed to the modern calendars which are solar based - Passover does not occur on the same *gregorian/julian* day each year (but always sometime in March or April).

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Passover is an eight day celebration that starts every year on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan - unlike Easter, Nisan 15 is not always on the same day of the week.

The common Gregorian calendar uses an extra day every four years to synchronize the calendar year to the solar year since we are off by about a quarter day per year.

The Jewish lunar calendar is about 11 days short of the solar year so it adds an occasional leap month (within a complicated nineteen year cycle) to synchronize the lunar year to the solar year.

The formula to determine the date of Passover, therefore, is more complicated than Easter.

The jewish Passover and the christian Easter have a common historical root, even if the dates can vary. They are always within a few weeks of each other.

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FYI, in 2019

- Passover: Fri, April 19 (sundown)
- Gregorian (**our**) Easter: Sun, April 21 (midnight)
- Julian Easter: Sun, April 28 (midnight)

in 2020

- Passover: Wed, April 8 (sundown)
- Gregorian Easter: Sun, April 12 (midnight)
- Julian Easter: Sun, April 19 (midnight)

in 2021

- Passover: Sat, March 27 (sundown)
- Gregorian Easter: Sun, April 4 (midnight)
- Julian Easter: Sun, May 2 (midnight)

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Easter and Passover are connected because all four of the new testament gospels record that, when Jesus was crucified, he (and some of his closest followers) had travelled from Capernaum in Galilee to Jerusalem in Judea to take in the Passover festival.

Because we don't know for sure what year that was, we aren't sure what day that week was the first day of Passover for that fateful pilgrimage. The gospel texts imply it was either Thursday or Friday.

However, all of the gospels agree that Jesus died on the Friday and that his disciples learned on the Sunday that he had been raised from the dead.

The start of Passover can fall on any day of the week, but because the original day of Jesus' resurrection was a Sunday, Easter is always a Sunday.

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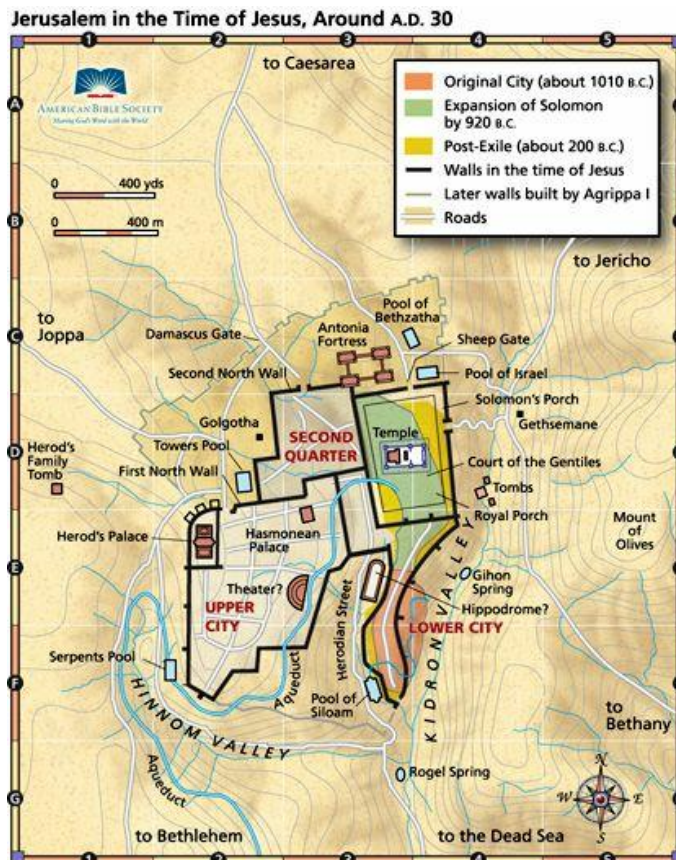
It is a fair interpretation of the biblical gospel narratives to say that Jesus and his band of followers lived out their hebrew faith (broadly) within the pharassaic tradition.

They gathered in local synagogues for regular religious learning and faithful community.

They appreciated ritual and often made pilgrimages to the Jerusalem Temple for high feast days.

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Jesus and his disciples arrived in the Jerusalem area a few days in advance of the start of Passover. The text tells us that by the Sunday before the Passover, they had set up camp on the mount of Olives on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem.



On that Sunday, they planned to make their way into the city for the first time on this visit.

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For three years, Jesus had been teaching about the sovereignty of God. The phrase that both John the Baptism and Jesus used was to say that *The Kingdom of God has come near*.

Jesus had taught about this directly: *Don't worry about what you will eat and drink or what you will wear, but strive first for the kingdom of god and god's righteousness and all these things will be given to you; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a greedy person to enter the kingdom of god.*

Jesus had told parables to help explain how God has authority in the lives of the people and how they are part of that kingdom... *the kingdom of god is like a tiny seed that produces a big tree; the kingdom of god is like a shepherd finding a lost sheep.*

Jesus had offered healing as a manifestation of this holy kingdom. Luke, chapter ten, tells us about Jesus sending out pairs of disciples with this instruction: *Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."*

Jesus had connected *understanding the prominence of loving God, Self, and Others* with God's realm. When a scribe agreed that this is much more important than all of the burnt-offerings and sacrifices, Jesus told him: *you are not far from the kingdom of god.*

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Over and over again, Jesus had emphasized that God was the true authority in people's lives and that this kingdom was very different from the kingdoms of this world.

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On the Sunday before Passover, Jesus decided to offer this teaching yet again, but in a new way.

*Go into the village ahead of you, and find a colt that has never been ridden. They brought it to Jesus; and Jesus sat on it. As he rode along down from the Mount of Olives, the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'*

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It is not clear whether the disciples realized (in the moment) that Jesus was acting out a bible passage from Zechariah: *O Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious,*

*humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

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As we read on in the holy week narratives, we learn that the Roman Prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate, was in Jerusalem during this time as well.

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Modern theologian, John Dominic Crossan, has speculated that when the governor entered the city, he most likely rode in from the west with an entourage on horseback. It would have (intentionally) been a show of power: war-like, intimidating. Caesar's representative had to send a strong message of who was truly in charge.

Contrast that with Jesus more humble entry from the east.

Dom Crossan likes his audiences to imagine these parades happening at the same time approaching the centre of the city from opposite ends.

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Caesar on a collision course.

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Zechariah's regal image is not of the king ready to wage war, it is the ruler whose battle is passed: coming in peace and humility - not on a war horse, but a humble beast of burden.

It was a signal that the conscripted soldiers were taking off their uniforms and returning to their farms. The swords were being replaced by plowshears.

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The palm parade (on the path down from the Mount of Olives) was a **non-spoken parable**. *The Kingdom of God is not like the Kingdom of Rome.*

Whereas Rome ruled through intimidation and military might, Jesus was showing God's rule through peace and compassion.

Palm Sunday makes a not-so-subtle contrast between a kingdom of war and a kingdom of peace!

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It seems that, on that day at least, Jesus (and his vision of humble leadership) was warmly welcomed.

And, really, who doesn't welcome peace, especially when conflict has dominated.



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Jesus, symbolizing a kingdom of peace was welcomed into Jerusalem.

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What does it mean to tell someone: *you are welcome*?

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*You are welcome* (in english) is also used as a response to being thanked.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

The roots of saying **you're welcome** seems to be a shortening of a statement like "**you're** words of gratitude are **welcome** to me".

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It is human nature to like to be appreciated: we welcome being thanked.

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Only in our most selfish moment would we do things for others simply for the adulation.

But... it does feel good to be thanked.

Certainly, the opposite is true.

We really need to be committed to a cause to continue on with a *thankless job*.

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

And so, it may not be our primary motivating factor, but we do welcome being appreciated.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

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When we tell someone that they are "welcome" - we are inviting them into a positive relationship with us. We are saying "come well" into this place. Be well. Be happy. Feel safe.

To welcome is to create a time and place that can be relaxing and free for people to be who they are.

I love the Spanish phrase of welcome: *mi casa es su casa* or *mi casa es tu casa* (my house is your house).

To be welcoming is to allow the newcomer to feel like a long-timer.

At #395 in the Voices United Hymn book, we can sing this welcome attitude:

*Children and elders ... longtime and new*

*Nobody here has a claim on a pew*

*And whether we're many or only a few*

*We are a part of the family*

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Virtually every church I know - from everywhere on the theological spectrum - from the most charismatic to the deeply liturgical - uses the phrase *all are welcome* in their promotions.

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And yet, what that means certainly varies between individual communities of faith - even within the same denomination.

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What does it mean when a church says to the wider community: you are welcome?

What does it mean when St. David's UC in Leduc says: you are welcome?

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Our formal mission statement uses welcome language:

*The mission of St. David's is to welcome all to participate in its nurturing Christian community and to inspire its people to serve others as Christ taught!*

Our formal congregational motto is similar:

*Welcoming In ~ Reaching Out*

It has been more than thirty years since, both of these turns of phrase were adopted by this congregation.

Thirty years is a long time.

How many of you weren't even part of the congregation when those statements were being created? Those of you who were hear, how fresh is that memory?

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I imagine that the most relevant questions are:

- Is the church the same as it was thirty years ago? Has our place within the community remained the same.
- Are you the same today as you were in the late eighties? I know that your body is older, you are physically different, but do you think the same way? Have your beliefs and values changed at all? Do you view the world through the same lenses?
- Does "welcome" mean the same thing? Another way of saying that... the word is the same, but does it mean the same thing? Has *how we interpret it* changed? Has the congregation's circle of welcome become wider, smaller, or is it unchanged?

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Whenever a group or an organization purports to have an open door policy, I am always curious if they are truly prepared for who might walk through the door.

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What expectations are presented (explicitly and implicitly) to the newcomers from the already-here's?

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Welcome styles tend to fit somewhere on a continuum between:

- The group's parameters are pretty well already set and the newcomer has to decide whether they can fit into that or not; and
- The group dynamic is fluid and depends on who makes it up at any given moment. At this edge of welcome possibilities, a newcomer has a ready opportunity to re-create the group in

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

their own image.

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From an insider perspective: do we welcome you to join us or affect us?

From an outsider perspective: do I want to join you or change you?

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These are (of course) the hard edge extremes of a continuum. Most groups evolve over time, largely influenced by who comes and goes. Almost all groups that have any hope of enduring beyond its current membership are open to change.

It's just that different groups find the evolutionary process more difficult than others.

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Church communities, by their nature, have some basic parameters that define the edges of who they are. Those parameters will determine what welcome means.

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My observations (over the almost nineteen years I have been a minister of this church) is that this church has a reasonably clear sense of who it is, but that includes some pretty broad practices of welcome.

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You are (in my interpretation) - largely - *red letter christians*: a phrase that picks up on the practice of some bible publishers to print the direct quotations purported to Jesus in red ink, as a way of having them stand out to the readers.

By "Red Letter Christians" I mean that we base our welcome model on the welcoming style of Jesus.

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Jesus maintained some pretty clear ideas of what he considered to be right, just and faithful living: he believed that the most important expectations were to open our hearts fully and humbly to God *and* to live out compassion for others.

And yet... Jesus refused to pre-judge who might be capable of living into these expectations. Jesus refused to let social divides relating to age, occupation, gender, ritual cleanliness, past struggles, etc. bar people from the front door of joining Jesus in his ministry. And Jesus grew to see virtually no barriers to people he would be willing to reach out to in compassion or healing.

In the decades after Jesus, we see the outer edges of the church stretch beyond those born into Jesus' own faith tradition. Stephen could not justify excluding foreign converts to Judaism from the circle of Jesus' followers. When confronted with the faith of the gentile Cornelius, Peter was forced to admit that "God shows no partiality". That paved the way for Paul, who - at first saw Christianity as incompatible with his faith - swung the door the other way and worked hard to include both Jews and Gentiles within the Way of Jesus.

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That kind of welcome is not always what the world gives.

But as Jesus said to his friends on the evening he would be arrested: *not as the world gives do I give* (Jn14).

Jesus exemplifies a realm of peace not a realm of might.

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As 21st century friends of Jesus, we open the door of welcome because, we believe that what we are experiencing together is not to be hoarded... it is too good not to share.

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And at the same time, we know that the subtleties of those experiences ebb and flow by the make up of the community itself.

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Honest welcoming changes the mix of who we are and so it creates a new new. It is a shared dance of discovery where the Spirit of God is invited to grow our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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In a way, I think that when we say *you're welcome*, we are meaning a bit more. It's more than, come in the door. It is *you belong here*, you have a valuable part to play. You are more than a guest passing through. You are a "part" of the greater us from the moment God has brought us together.

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As we move into this *holy week*, we will seek to discover whether when Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: was he invited to just fit it or was he able to affect the very nature of the community.

If you can, take a look at chapters 19-23 in Luke \*or\* come to the special services on Thursday and Friday, as we delve into those parts of the journey between Palm Sunday and Easter.

Between now and then the Kingdom of Caesar and the Kingdom of God will meet head on.

The palm sunday welcome will be tested.

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Let us pray:

Stay with us, God, as we begin this *holy week*. Remind us that you include all within the circles of your love. Amen.

#137VU (tune #2) "Welcome Jesus, You Are Welcome"