



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 25, 2018

"Jesus Christ ~~Santa Claus~~ Is Coming to Town"

Christopher Pan

Good morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

I am always very honored to have the opportunity to preach, and I feel particularly so today, as I get to preach on the Sunday that falls right in-between our two most significant national holidays. That would be Black Friday last week and Cyber Monday tomorrow! I hope you got a lot of great deals and didn't get hurt, or hurt anyone else.

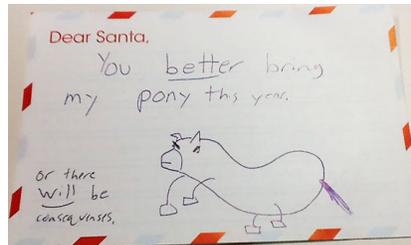
Of course, the real holidays we're in-between are Thanksgiving last week and Christmas, coming up in exactly 30 days.

I love Christmas season, and I love Christmas music and I'm so glad that we've started singing Christmas songs today. My all-time favorite Christmas song is Bing Crosby and David Bowie singing, "Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth" together. If you didn't know that this existed, I highly recommend it. It is awesome.

My other favorite Christmas song is Bruce Springsteen singing, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." If you don't know it, here's a little sample. Catchy right! I want that song stuck in your head all day.

I think it is easy to get caught up in the madness of the holiday

season, thinking that the whole point is to get the best TV deal possible or making demands of Santa Claus.



Here is a letter to Santa Claus I found posted online that perfectly captures what the season of Santa Claus feels like: "Dear Santa, You better bring my pony this year. Or there will be consequences." I particularly like the emphatic underlines under better and will; the creative spelling of consequences; and the distinctly eggplant-shaped pony.

Pastor Tim Keller has pointed out that Christmas is actually two different holidays being celebrated by millions of people at the same time. There's secular Christmas, which is a festival of lights, and time for family gatherings and gift-giving and Santa Claus. Given the commercial importance of secular Christmas to the economy, it's not going anywhere.

But then there is another Christmas entirely, Christmas as a Holy Day with distinctly sacred origins and significance.

Of course, for us, followers of Jesus, the real meaning of Christmas is not Santa Claus bringing us ponies, it's not Santa Claus coming to Town. It is that Jesus Christ is coming to Town.

Our Sermon Title today is. "Jesus Christ ~~Santa Claus~~ is Coming to Town."

As you heard in Carolyn's beautiful testimony, today we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent. Advent derives from the Latin word for "coming". It is the season of weeks before Christmas of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, as well as the return of Jesus at the Second Coming.

With Thanksgiving just a few days behind us, let's collectively take a deep breath, and recalibrate, and refocus, on the coming of Jesus Christ.

As we enter this holiday season, I know that it is a hard and painful season for many. It is a time of stressful family obligations. There's lots of end of the year work and business deadlines and end of semester tests and papers.

It is a particularly hard time for those who are mourning and grieving the loss of loved ones.

But Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is coming. His Kingdom is coming. As we just sang, "Glory to the newborn King! Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled."

And so today, on the first Sunday of Advent, let's take that deep breath, and refocus on the expectant waiting and preparation for the approach of Jesus Christ.

Will you please join me in prayer? Jesus, we turn our eyes to You. You are our coming King and we wait expectantly for You. May Your Holy Spirit speak to us and transform us. We pray in Your mighty name, and all of God's people say, "Amen!"

Jesus Christ is coming to town. Our passage today is Mark 11:1-11. We've been walking chapter by chapter through the whole gospel of Mark in our Hope Restored sermon series this year. For the first ten chapters, Jesus has been traveling all around the Holy Land. But here in Chapter 11, there is a significant shift in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus comes to Jerusalem. And from here to the end of the book of Mark, Jesus stays in and around Jerusalem.

As we go through our passage and our sermon today, ask yourself two questions: "What is God saying to me? What does He want me to do about it?"

Will you please stand, if you are able, and read aloud with me from the Book of Mark, Chapter 11, verses 1 through 11.

1 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples 2 and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there

a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"

4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and He sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.

9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

11 Then He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God!

If the passage seems familiar to you, it's because it is traditionally read on Palm Sunday, the week before Easter. I love having this Palm Sunday passage for the first week of Advent, because the themes of Jesus' entry as a humble King are so clear in both this passage and the Christmas narrative.

In the Christmas narrative, Jesus, Savior and King of the world, God incarnate, is born into

the world in a humble manger. And in our passage today, Jesus, King of the world, rides into town on a donkey. Our translation today says colt, but it is clear from this text and others that it is the offspring of a donkey, the colt of a donkey, so I'm going to say donkey.

I think we've all seen the Disney movie Aladdin, so we know what a royal procession into a city is supposed to look like. A caravan of people, a grand display of power and riches. People riding elephants.

The Roman Christians at the time Mark wrote his gospel could easily understand the massive contrast between the pageantry that greeted Roman Emperors returning to the city on one hand, and Jesus' humble entry to the city on the other.

When Caesar enters the city, returning from battle, Caesar rides a chariot pulled by glorious, prancing white horses at the head of a long and fearsome procession. Behind Caesar and his chariot is his whole army, in full uniform and with all their swords and shields and spears. Behind them would be all the conquered people, marching in chains and shackles. And behind them would be all the loot and treasure plundered from the conquered land.

Some historians have pointed out that on the day Jesus entered the city on a donkey, it was likely that Pontius Pilate was actually entering Jerusalem at the same time on the other side of the city.

Pontius Pilate was the governor of the area, so it would be natural that he would be arriving in Jerusalem to maintain law and order during the Passover.

So, Pilate would be entering the City through the Main Gate, the West Gate, in a procession like Caesar or Aladdin: with white horses, and chariots, and soldiers carrying spears and swords following behind.

On the other side of the city, from the East Gate, the back gate of the city, Jesus enters.

In contrast to Pilate and Caesar, Jesus enters on a donkey. Instead of a long procession of military might, walking with Jesus are a small rag tag group of fishermen and a tax collector and a political extremist and a prostitute and various people healed from leprosy and deafness and blindness.

They walk with Jesus not because they are forced to, chained and shackled. They walk with Jesus precisely because they have been freed from their chains and shackles, healed from their infirmities. They walk not because power compels them, but because Jesus' LOVE compels them.

You know, when we read the Bible, one of the ways to really understand it is to picture yourself in the narrative. Really place yourself in the scene as one of the characters.

You know who I really identify with in this passage, with Jesus and His disciples entering the City, with crowds lining the street waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna! When I read this passage, I picture myself as the owner of the donkey.

There's a donkey, right? And someone must own that donkey. So, when we read today's passage, I picture myself as that guy, who's taken his favorite donkey to town. Special day! Me and my special never-been-riden donkey going to

town. Maybe I'm going to sell my donkey at the market, so I've got my flyers printed out: Brand New Donkey, Mint Condition, Never Been Ridden.

And I go into town and tie it up in the street, and go into to the coffee shop and get my coffee and read the Sunday paper, and I come out and my donkey is gone. So, I say to the group of people standing there, "Hey, did you see what happened to the donkey that was right here?"

And they say, "Oh yeah, these two guys came along and started untying it, and we got your back, we said, 'Eh, what are you doing? Untying that donkey?' And they said, 'The Lord needs it.' So we said, 'Oh, yeah, that's cool, go ahead then.' So they took your donkey."

I'm the owner of the donkey, standing there in the street, thinking, "The LORD needs it? I need it – it's my donkey!"

If I had a longer title for today's sermon, it would be "Jesus Christ is Coming to Town and He Needs Your Donkey."

Our passage today again: **1b** [Jesus] sent two of His disciples **2** and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. **3** If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"

4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, **5** some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" **6** They told

them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

So, I'm the donkey owner, standing in the street, my donkey's gone, and I have a choice to make. Do I run after them and say, "Hey give me back my donkey! That's mine." Or do I grapple with and wrestle with these four words, and their profound implication on my life?

"The Lord needs it." The Lord needs it. The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.

Why does Jesus need a donkey? Jesus needs a donkey, because God has a plan, and the donkey is part of the fulfillment of a 500-year-old prophecy.

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah writes this, 500 years before Jesus in Zechariah 9:9 - **9** Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey...

10 He shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

Jesus the triumphant and victorious King, needs my donkey. Jesus is on a mission to command peace to the nations and establish His dominion from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth. And He needs to ride a donkey. He needs my donkey.

A few weeks back, Pastor Dan preached about the rich young ruler to whom Jesus instructed, "Go sell all you have and follow Me," and the rich young man couldn't do it.

In today's passage, the owner of the donkey also has to choose how to react, but just about his one donkey.

Does anyone here own a donkey? Of course we do. We all do. We all are donkey owners. Except our donkey might be our time, or our energy, or our money, or our talents, or hard work, or intellect, or our very lives.

And one day, maybe even today, someone will come along and say to you, "The Lord needs it. The Lord needs it and will send it back immediately."

And we all will have a choice to make. Do we say, "No, that's *mine*, I need it." Or do we say, "It's Your's Lord," and give it away, and wait for it to come back to us, changed?

Because I'm pretty sure Jesus was true to His word, and gave back the donkey after His ride into Jerusalem, just as He promised.

And that donkey came back changed. Now the donkey owner has to update his flyer. It is no longer: "Brand New Donkey, Mint Condition, Never Been Ridden."

His flyer now has to say: Almost New Donkey, Low Miles, All City, Only One Rider: Jesus of Nazareth, Believed to be Savior and King of the World." Which donkey would you rather have? Which one is more valuable?

Right now, you can buy a brand new Yankees baseball jersey for \$99. That's it (picture of one on the slide). At an auction in 2012, a USED Yankees baseball jersey, worn once by Babe Ruth in 1920, believed to be the best baseball player ever, sold for \$4.4 million dollars. That's a picture of it on the right.

"The Lord needs it and will send it back immediately." The Lord needs what you uniquely have to give. You are part of His plan and mission. And do we give it to Jesus, believing that we'll get it back, changed, and better, and more valuable? Having been touched by Jesus, now one-of-a-kind.

I first starting coming to this church eight years ago. At the time, I wasn't on staff, I was a lawyer, working downtown. I would come, on Sundays, usually a few minutes late, drop off my kids downstairs, and sit in the farthest row in the back, all the way back against the glass. After the service, I would pick up my kids and go home. I didn't "volunteer" or "get involved in the community." My time was valuable, and my time was *mine*.

A few years in, someone found out that I had gone to both Divinity School and Law School. At the time, the church was forming a committee that would explore if we should change denominations. So, I got a call from Pastor Tim Shaw, asking if I would "help serve" on that committee, given my unique theological and legal experience.

So, the reason I picture myself in today's passage as the donkey owner, standing in the street, wondering how to respond when I hear: "The Lord needs it" about my donkey, is because that's exactly where I was. But my donkey was my time.

I liked not being involved, because I could do what I wanted to do, when I wanted. And I knew that if I said yes to being on that committee, I would get more involved, and my time would be less my own.

And so I had a very clear choice, do I respond to the need, and say, "No, my time is *mine*, my donkey is *mine*." Or do I recognize that I had been given certain resources, in education and experience, for such a time as this, perhaps to be used in service for the greater kingdom and purposes of God?

I'm here to tell you today: Jesus Christ is coming to town, and He needs your donkey.

If it's not clear, I said yes to being on that committee. One thing led to another, and look what's happened. So, watch out! But it will look different for you than me because you have a different donkey than me. Maybe it your time, maybe it's your money, maybe it's your very life itself.

Every Sunday, and all throughout the week, there are hundreds of volunteers at our church giving their time to the Lord. And I am incredibly grateful for each and every one of you. Maybe today the Lord is saying to those who haven't gotten involved yet, saying about your time: The Lord needs it. Shuttle van drivers, parking attendants, ushers, greeters, tech team, buildings and grounds, facilitators for Grief Share and Divorce Care and Celebrate Recovery, Alpha, Rooted, small group leaders, Military Moms Night Out, Children and Youth ministry, the prayer team. All run by volunteers.

Every Christmas tree and decoration you see on campus today was put up by a volunteer yesterday and Friday. Every bulletin you hold in your hands was folded and stuffed by a volunteer, who gave their time, believing that the Lord needed it, and that they would get that time back, changed and more valuable.

If you walk around campus today, you'll see how we're serving our larger community. We're having a Blood Drive to support the Blood Bank of Hawaii. There's a Bake Sale, to support care packages that our Youth ministry will hand out to our homeless this Christmas. Gifts of Love starts today.

I encourage you to take the bulletin home and look at all the ministries that happen here every week, and listen to what the Lord is saying to you about getting involved.

"The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." Over \$400,000 dollars has come in so far for The 547 Project, for us to open a satellite campus in Kaka'ako. Praise God for all of you who gave, believing that the Lord needs it, and that it will come back to you, changed, and better. We continue to receive donations, and will provide an update next week when Pastor Dan preaches.

A short note here. I grew up during a time when televangelists said they needed \$8 million dollars or the Lord would call them home. A preacher was in the news recently because he said he needed \$54 million dollars to buy his fourth jet. I don't want to be that guy, when I say, "the Lord needs it."

To quote an old U2 song, "The God I believe in isn't short of cash, mister." The Lord needs it, not because He lacks something, or lacks anything. The Lord needs it because He has a plan.

In our passage today, Jesus doesn't tell His disciples, "Go into town and guilt-trip someone into loaning me a donkey." He gives specific instructions to His disciples, where the donkey is going to be, how it's tied up.

Jesus already knows. Jesus already sees...you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake.

Jesus already knows what you have, and what you have to offer. Today, you might think you're just a donkey, with nothing to offer, or that the kingdom doesn't need what you have to give. But, here's the truth: God knows you. God sees you. And You are valuable and vital to the plan of God. You have a kingdom purpose. God's will is going to get done with or without you. Your mission and your calling, is that God desires *you*, and desires that *you* fulfill your invaluable role in the advancing Kingdom of heaven.

If that's inspiring to you, great! If that is daunting, even better. If that is absolutely terrifying to you, now you know how I feel!

However you are feeling, I'll close with this good news: Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the crowd shouts, "Hosanna! Hosanna!"

I always thought Hosanna meant "Praise!" On Palm Sunday, all our kids up here waving palm branches, saying, "Praise the Lord! Hosanna!"

You know what Hosanna actually means? SAVE US. Save Us. And that right there is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the true meaning of Christmas and the good news of grace. Save Us! Because we can't do it on our own. We need saving. We need a Savior.

On our own, we end up at the main gate of the city cheering for Caesar and Pilate, cheering for a parade of power and wealth and domination over others. On our

own, despair and loneliness threaten to overwhelm us. On our own, all we have is Christmas as a secular festival of lights. On our own, we're the kid telling Santa Claus, "You better bring my pony this year! Or there will be consequences."

We need a Savior to Save Us. We need a Savior to change us from someone who demands a pony to someone who loans out our donkey. Only Jesus can save us from ourselves. And so on this first Sunday of Advent, Jesus Christ is Coming to Town. Let's freely give our donkey to the Lord, and let's go to the back gate of the city, and shout: "Hosanna! Hosanna! Jesus, Save Us!" Amen? Amen.

Let's close in prayer.

Let's take a few moments now, in silence, to come before the Lord. What is God saying to you? What does he want you to do about it? Speak freely and honestly with God now.

Jesus, You are the God who saves us. Hosanna! Jesus, save us! And all God's people say, "Amen!"

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by contacting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com