



## Palm Sunday: It Feels Like Jesus Showed Up

Mark 11:1-11

We hear cheering and sounds of victory a lot. Graduations. The elementary school play. We hear that all the time at ballgames and sporting events don't we? Thousands of people cheering on their team. Now I want you to imagine it during a parade...but NOT the parade you are thinking of.

During the Festival of the Passover the city of Jerusalem would have been filled with Jews from all over the country. Thousands upon thousands of people all in one city, all ready to celebrate their history and their God.

It was a time when the Jews in the city would have vastly outnumbered the Romans.

Pilate had to keep order and show the people who was in charge. So, about the same time as a couple of Jesus disciples are looking for a random donkey tied to a post minding it's own business, Pilate would have been aboard a giant float rolling through the city in a parade designed to show force.

You've seen this. Think about the old footage from World War II or the Cold War or North Korea. Let's put all our big weapons on trucks and parade them through the city surrounded by an army that could put down any rebellion.

Pilate would have been riding on a giant horse or maybe on a float and the Roman army would have been there with swords and shields banging and clanging and making as much noise as

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possible. It would have been a show of force designed to keep the rabble cowed and quiet and in their place.

Now the parade is over. The banging and clanging are in the distance and in another part of the city people hear singing.

They gather around the gate to see what the commotion is and here comes a rabbi on a donkey. No armies. No floats. No marching band. No pop-star dressed in bright colors and lip-synching to pre-recorded music. Just a guy on a donkey.

Here's what Jesus knew that Pilate probably didn't.

The prophet Zechariah - whom most of the people would have had to memorize at some point - had said,

“See your king come to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.”

Jesus even quotes half the verse. He says it to the people but just HALF of it. They would have known the second half as well as the first. But Jesus let them fill in the blanks. The second half of that verse goes like this...

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses and battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations.       Zech. 9:9

Jesus is saying. That thing you've been waiting for...it's here. I'm it.

At one point Jesus was asked to preach in his hometown church. Every temple would have had a scroll...a very special scroll. It contained writings that ONLY the messiah would be allowed to read. Jesus calls for that scroll. The ushers would have carried it to him and laid it out on a table. Jesus read from it. Then he sat down and said, “That thing you've been waiting for? It's here. I'm it.”

So you have two parades. Each one entering from a different side of the city. Both of them for one purpose. To unite the people. One to unite the people in fear, the other to unite the people in peace.

One side comes in on war-horses in a show of force. The other comes in on a donkey. Humble. Basically, one voice singing against the multitudes shouting.

Again, we must ask ourselves at this time of year...what kind of church are we going to be? Are we coming in from one gate or the other. Are we going to frighten people into the Kingdom or are we going to love them into the Kingdom? Are we using fear or love?

Are we going to approach conflicts at work or in our own homes with shouting and force or are we going to come together to create peace?

Jesus brings peace and truth and love and understanding. The disciple in the video is right. There is nothing better than when Jesus shows up.

...in our world.

...in our church.

...in our homes.

...in our hearts.

...in our minds.

It all starts here.

With us.

We don't know which of the disciples Jesus told to go and retrieve the colt. We just know that they did what Jesus told them to do and at the end of the day those disciples and all who were a part of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on that day were feeling excited about what they had just experienced. It felt like Jesus showed up with the expectations of a long awaited Messiah by a people who were ready for something to change.

Mark 11:1-11 is where the story is found within our Bible text today.

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” <sup>4</sup> And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. <sup>5</sup> And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup> And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. <sup>7</sup> And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. <sup>9</sup> And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” <sup>11</sup> And 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.” Mark 11:1-11

Sporting events have taken introductions of the players and teams to new heights. A team no longer simply can enter a field of play or arena to compete in the game at hand. Now there must be an accompaniment of laser light shows, fog machines, pumping music and a public address emcee backed with appropriate video montages before the competitors actually begin the game. The introductions of the players somehow make a statement to all who are present.

What Jesus did when he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey during Passover week made an unforgettable statement about who he was and what he was claiming to be: the Messiah! Up to this point Jesus consistently wanted his identity to remain quiet. He would tell both disciples and demons not to utter a word about who he was because his time had not yet come. But on this day, Jesus the Messiah made his grand entrance for all to see. The magnitude of his announcement would become clearer in hindsight. But he was declaring who he was as Messiah with some profoundly symbolic actions on this day.

He already had made a name for himself by the raising of his friend Lazarus from the dead. Jesus and his friends had been staying with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, on the outskirts of Jerusalem in the village of Bethany. It was about two miles outside of town and Jesus found this place among friends to be a restful retreat where his soul could breathe as he relaxed. After enjoying a Sabbath rest here, Jesus is ready for his introduction.

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” <sup>4</sup> And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. <sup>5</sup> And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup> And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.” Mark 11:1-6

Jesus had many connections and people who were following him as his popularity grew. Scholars differ on whether or not he personally had made arrangements with the owners of the colt that he would ask his disciples to retrieve. Some seem to think Jesus supernaturally knew what would take place and thus told his disciples what to do and what to say regarding the donkey. We do not know whether Jesus had made arrangements with a pre-decided upon phrase with the owner or if he was pulling off some ancient God superpower that Hollywood might try and portray as a “Jedi mind trick” by Jesus. What we do know is that all unfolded just as Jesus told his disciples that it would. They went and retrieved the donkey that would be such a symbolic mode of transportation into and through the parade that led to a crowded and buzzing Jerusalem.

“<sup>7</sup> And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. <sup>9</sup> And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” Mark 11:7-10

Of course Jesus sat on the donkey and made his introduction in this manner. For such an entrance is how the prophets foretold of the coming of their king who would rescue them from all that oppressed them. This entrance on the back of a donkey would be more symbolic and make a

bigger statement to the crowd than any modern day introduction at a stadium ever could muster. Jesus fully was aware that such an entrance would be the fulfillment of Zachariah's prophecy that so quickly would be identified with by the people along the parade route.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup>I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>11</sup>As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup>Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. <sup>13</sup>For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.” Zechariah 9:9-13

The people at the Triumphal Entry parade were aware of the introduction by Jesus on the donkey. They were thinking: Rescue is coming! The King is here! Our Messiah is arriving just as the prophet of old said he would. All was about to be made right. Freedom from the oppressors was about to be more than a promise they longed for to come true. In their eyes it was about to be the start of a new life because Jesus had shown up in this symbolic manner.

Had Jesus come riding in on a stallion it would have sent a different message that the Roman authorities likely would have shut down in quick manner. A war horse would have sent a totally different message than a meek donkey did. The donkey represented not only a fulfillment of prophecy, but also announced peaceful intentions to those ruling with the watchful eye on the people.

The people not only waved the palms and shouted with hopeful joy, but also were quoting one of the famous lines from Psalm 118:25-26 as they cried out,

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

The word “Hosanna” was a call that meant to “save” us! It was a cry for help by a people who had been oppressed for far too long in their estimation. The words from this Psalm were said and sung each year at this time. They were words from a group of Psalms known as Hallel Psalms. Psalm 113-118 are Hallel Psalms that are preeminently psalms of praise associated with the Passover celebrations and sacrifices of the Passover lambs in the Temple.

The Messianic overtones from the chanting and singing of the crowds on that day no doubt were stirring the dreams of a new Davidic dynasty among the people of God although these same chants would turn to “crucify him” within the week's end. The chanting crowd soon would

realize that Jesus did not fit into the form of preconceived expectations of a conquering King. What true Messiah would start the week in a parade like Palm Sunday and end with an embarrassing crucifixion like the one that would take place on Good Friday? It would not be the Messiah they had in mind.

What seemed clear in one instance became murky regarding the Messiah in the next? It was hard for the people and even the disciples to figure out what was happening as the time elapsed. It would not be until after Jesus had walked through the week and eventually been crucified, buried, and resurrected that all would begin to make sense.

Hindsight is twenty-twenty. That would come later. Right now, it was time to celebrate the day and the one who was riding into town on the donkey. And the day was beginning to fade toward evening. At the conclusion of the entry the passage from Mark shows where Jesus went to survey the landscape.

“And 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.” Mark 11:11

The Temple complex was chaotic and overflowing with people. What Jesus saw, heard, smelled and experienced was anything but holy and reverent. It was crawling not only with animals for sale to be sacrificed, but also with greedy religiosity and a stench of something gone awry from the original intent of this meeting place between man and God. Jesus made mental notes and retreated back home on this Sunday evening to Bethany with his friends. What he would do the next day would be more memorable than even the parade into town in Messianic fashion. For tomorrow he would cleanse the temple and continue making his entrance into Jerusalem known with more Messianic overtones.

If Palm Sunday's Triumphal Entry fulfilled the prophecy from Zachariah 9, Monday's march into the Temple would fulfill what the prophet Malachi foretold many years earlier.

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.<sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.” Malachi 3:1-3

Perhaps these were the words of old that Jesus pondered as he retreated back to Bethany at the conclusion of the day that had been filled with so much celebration. Jesus was on the move. Things happen when Jesus shows up. And business was about to pick up in a new way the next day in the Temple. But for this Palm Sunday in Jerusalem, an excitement was experienced by all who were present because Jesus had shown up with great fanfare and an unforgettable introduction.