

Donkey ride anyone?
Matt. 21:1-11

Jesus walked everywhere he went. Once he even walked across a lake. But he has chosen to ride a donkey into Jerusalem. What's that all about?

Let's pray.

God, in your Son we see a model for humility and peace. May the vision of Jesus on a donkey help us keep our lives and goals in perspective, and our actions and reactions humble, yet courageous. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Maybe this is the year. Maybe this Palm Sunday Jesus will show up on a horse. Horses are stronger and more imposing; horses are faster and more elegant. Maybe this year he'll ride in on a horse.

My sisters and brothers, hold your horses! Again this year, the Master, our model, rides in on a donkey (like mother, like son, I guess).

It's easy to see Jesus' humility in this impromptu parade. He's riding a donkey and by now we've come to expect that kind of humility from Jesus; we look for it in this great champion of peace, indeed, the very Prince of Peace. And sure enough, there it is on display, right in front of God and everyone: humility, teetering between courage and comedy, balancing between champion and clown, heading straight into Jerusalem.

How difficult was it for those in the crowd who believed and those who hoped, to hail Jesus as King? Were the nonbelievers in the crowd chuckling at the sight of a grown

man on a donkey? I can imagine his feet nearly dragging the ground. Why didn't he just go ahead and walk. That would have been impressive, a determined walk into the teeth of danger. No one would have laughed at that. That's something you could believe in, especially if the walk had a little bit of a John Wayne swagger to it.

But no, he is still the humble Jesus, still teaching, ever the example, even on his big day.

And the crowds are shouting, "Hosanna, hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna," and "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord."

As you know, crowds can get worked up at a parade. That's not always the case; there is such a thing as a boring parade. But its not unusual for crowds to cheer and shout and applaud at parades.

Janna and I have lived in New Orleans on two different occasions, both times because of my being a seminary student there. We love that remarkable town that has long had the prophetic nickname, "the city that care forgot."

During our times of living there, we went to many Mardi Gras parades. Folks get excited at Mardi Gras parades. Even I did, now and then. Social clubs known as Krewe build floats and get permits to parade through the streets of New Orleans and the surrounding suburbs. Float after float comes by in these parades all through the Carnival season, which begins on 12th night (early in January) and goes right up to the stroke of the 12th hour that begins Ash Wednesday; parade after parade, with the number of them increasing each day. The city of New Orleans plays King and Queen for the entire Carnival season. Each krewe has a king; many of them also have a queen. They are

dressed in costumes, all elegant, some silly. The thing that's really different, though, about Mardi Gras parades is that those on the floats (the king, the queen, and their courts) all throw things off of the floats out into the crowd. They throw plastic doubloons, and beads, and trinkets of every sort, none of them worth a dime, in response to the crowd's frenzied shouts of "Throw me something mister (or sister)." "Throw me something," and the people in the crowds push and shove and dive to catch these worthless prizes.

I have to admit that I was often in that crowd, shouting, shoving, stomping...yes, stomping my foot on a doubloon that somehow made it to the ground, often stepping on a hand that got to the prize before my foot did. I was there, doing all that, though I was determined in my first few parades that I would never stoop to such behavior.

A parade can be an exciting thing. It surely was on that day of palm branches and cloaks being thrown down and hosannas being lifted up. It was exciting, even if the only float was just a donkey. The crowds in our passage for today weren't shouting "throw me something mister," they were shouting "hosanna to the Son of David." But, the truth is, the phrases aren't all that different. "Hosanna" was shouted as a word of praise, something akin to "Hallelujah," but "hosanna" does have a specific meaning.

In shouting that word, the crowd may have been more honest than they knew. The word means, "Help, we pray," or "Please help us, save us." I don't know how many people in the crowd knew that that was what they were shouting, but I think if they had known, they would have kept on shouting it anyway. There was a reason that they were excited about the prospects of a new king, a new government. And isn't it true that our praise of Christ always has a bit of a prayer for help in it? "Hosanna"...it sounds like

praise and we shout it as praise, but our deepest praise comes from the same depth of heart as does our deepest prayer. I'm in that crowd. My praise is attached to my petition and my petition is attached to my praise. I can claim to praise God purely, with no agenda or hope for blessing, but I'm not sure it can be done. God knows us and welcomes our praise and prayers of petition.

Some in the crowd are super critical. Some are shallow and will soon change their tune to "crucify." But others shout "hosanna" from honest hearts and in so doing shout their praise and prayer. There's a little "throw me something mister" in every "hosanna." But Jesus refuses to throw trinkets. He provides salvation for all who seek it through him. He provides healing and hope, without discrimination. But those aren't things he glibly tosses around. He's no showman and he's not pretending to be a king. He is a king, he is *the* king...but a king of a different sort.

Jesus understands and loves the uncertain and less-than-dependable crowd; that one back then and this one this morning. Jesus understands and loves and continues to ride into the events that await him in the days ahead...betrayal, a rigged trial, abuse, crucifixion, death. Jesus' humility so obviously portrayed on a donkey is pure courage. All humility is courageous. All courage is humble.

So what was so triumphant about the triumphal entry? It certainly was not the cheers of the crowd. The triumph was in the fact that Jesus and his message made it to this point unchanged, undiluted, unswerving. Jesus' ministry, lifestyle, and message started out simple, humble, and inclusive, and stayed that way in spite of every temptation, frustration, and misinterpretation. Triumph!

Palm Sunday gives us the hope that we can show up here Sunday after Sunday with a heart and life message that made it one more time through the week unchanged, undiluted, unswerving. Palm Sunday gives us that hope and Jesus gives us forgiveness when we stumble during the week. His triumph and ours is found in *his* consistency.

Well, Jesus and his parade finally made it into the city. The scripture reports that “When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking ‘Who is this?’” (v. 10).

Who is this, your king? Look! He does not ride as a great warrior, a powerful king. That’s a donkey, for crying out loud. He rides where bundles of wheat, baskets of grapes, and pots of water are tethered; on the back of a beast of burden. Is your king going to become a loaf of bread? Is he going to become wine? Is he water? Listen to the laughter as praise begins to transpose into mockery. It takes courage to even stay on the side of the road and claim Jesus as Lord in a situation like that.

Then our eyes meet as he slowly rides by. Our hearts are moved, out of love, not guilt, not even pity, but love. Look, he peers into the eyes of each person who had pressed inside the city gate, whether earlier, along the parade route, they had cast palm branches, cloaks, or dispersion. “Who is this?” Who is this, indeed?

“This is Jesus of Nazareth.” This is Jesus, our savior, our Lord- our example. And here’s the kicker: in our passage for this morning, Jesus asked for *two* donkeys and his disciples brought him *two* donkeys and the disciples spread their cloaks on the backs of *both* donkeys. Verse 7 says that Jesus sat on *them*. That’s plural, but even Jesus could only ride one at a time. It seems we have a donkey to be ridden by someone who has

Jesus' humility and courage. Its the colt, the smallest donkey of the two, a little donkey for a little Christ, a "Christian." He or she who remembers the Sermon on the Mount...come sit on this second donkey, the little one, and ride along, straight into the capital. This donkey is for one who shares Jesus' love that extends to even half-hearted worshipers and whole-hearted enemies. This second donkey is for someone who so loves and follows Jesus, someone so humble that for a moment, when you look at them, you'd swear you're seeing Jesus, causing even someone like Matthew to say for gospel truth, "They brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on *them*."

Donkey ride anyone? Amen.

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