

**+ Zechariah 9:9-10 + The Foolishness of the Cross: The Cross Means an Unlikely King +
+ 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + 20 March 2016 +**

What do you look for in a president? In this highly charged, politically tense world in which we live, I realize that a question like that can be like putting a lighted match to a keg of gunpowder. Spend a little time listening to two people discuss what they want in a president from opposing sides and you might get the impression that each thinks the other is the spawn of Satan as opposed to having a calm, level-headed dialogue on differing political views. But we're not here to talk preferred political candidates or political parties. Every voter has their own preferences and priorities, but there are some things that I think we all would love to see in a president.

None of us wants a tyrant. There have been enough of those in history, but we'd love to have a president who respects and upholds the rule of law, especially the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We'd love to have a president who is concerned about all the citizens of our country great and small, rich and poor, young and old, and especially concerned for the weak, the helpless, the suffering, the persecuted, and the marginalized. We'd love to have a president who is ready to defend our country, if necessary, from threats and enemies, but who always and honestly seeks peace first and foremost. We'd love to have a wise president who makes decisions, but is willing to listen and work with others. We'd love to have a president who always seeks what's best for our country. Looking back on our nation's history, you can find all kinds of examples of these traits—good, bad, and ugly.

...But before your mind goes wandering off to whatever else you would prefer in a president, you might first ask: "What does all this have to do with Jesus?" Like I said, you didn't come here to talk politics and candidates and primaries and parties, but you and I are here today because of a king. You see, a new King came riding into the city of Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, and the crowds of Passover pilgrims were thrilled. They were excited because centuries of promises had foretold the coming of this King.

Expectations were at an all-time high because everyone thought they knew what to expect from the Messiah—God's promised, chosen Savior-King. Many thought he would conquer Israel's foes and carry out God's holy judgment on the nations. Many thought he would throw off the oppression of the hated Romans and establish a new Jewish empire that would rule the world for eternity. Many thought he would bring a new era of prosperity for Israel. Many thought they knew what to expect from the Messiah, but as Jesus rode into pilgrim-packed Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, he wasn't what so many expected. No, Jesus was an unlikely king.

That had been foretold by God's Old Testament prophets—the faithful proclaimers of his Word through whom the Lord had also made promises of the coming King. About 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Lord used a prophet named Zechariah to prepare God's people for the coming King.

God's people had been in exile 1,000 miles away from home for nearly a century, but the Lord in his grace had enabled a remnant of his people to come back to Israel. But things weren't like they were before. The beautiful capital city of Jerusalem and the glorious temple of the Lord were in ruins overgrown with grass and weeds. The royal line of Israel's kings that had stretched back 500 years was long gone. The Persians controlled the region and the Jews were answerable to a Persian governor.

Yet a King was coming, who would one day come riding into that very city to great praise and joy. So what kind of king would he be? What kind of king would get all of Jerusalem, all of Zion, as it once was called, to burst with joy loudly shouting ancient hymns of praise? What kind of king would cause the Lord to proclaim, ***"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you!"***? Surely he would be a great and glorious king! It would be obvious, right?

Remember the King who comes is an unlikely king. Zechariah describes the coming King as ***"righteous and having salvation..."*** What does that mean? Unlike every presidential candidate who has ever lived, unlike any king or ruler who has ever lived, this King never does, says, or thinks anything wrong—ever. No amount of mudslinging can stick. You aren't able to dig up dirt on him, because there's no dirt to dig up—not even from his kindergarten teacher! His closet is spotless with not even a hint of a skeleton in there. In the truest sense of the word, the King who comes is innocent—morally righteous in every possible way in the eyes of his family, his friends, the community, and above all, God himself, but there's a reason for that.

Because he is truly, actually holy, this King comes with the ability to save, even more than that to be totally and completely victorious in that salvation. This isn't the promise of a candidate trying to secure votes by promising to "save" the economy or "save" jobs or "save" America from her enemies. No, this King comes with an ability that no king, no president, no ruler has ever had or ever will have. This King comes to "save" souls.

...But why rejoice over a King who is **“righteous and having salvation”**? The King who comes needs to be holy because you and I are not, have never been, and never will be. That’s a problem every one of us has had since our first parents disobeyed God and brought sin into our world centuries ago. You and I fail. We fall short. We sin in ignorance, in weakness, and even deliberately. So you and I need a substitute, someone who will be a perfect son or daughter, a perfect sister or brother, a perfect parent, a perfect classmate, a perfect employee or employer, a perfect friend, a perfect baby, a perfect child, a perfect teenager, and a perfect adult to take our place. So the Lord in his grace does the unlikely and sends a holy King who willingly puts himself in our place.

Because you are a sinner and so am I, the King who comes has to be able to save us. He has to do more than just be a moral example and a good teacher of righteous living. The King who comes has to save sinners from sin and guilt and grief and sorrow and pain and death and hell and Satan, but the only way he can do that is by death. The price for sin is death. The price for guilt is death. That means the King who comes has to die to save you. He has to offer himself as your substitute sacrifice to make you holy before God. The unlikely King who comes has to be **“righteous and having salvation.”**

Yet the King who comes is an unlikely king for another reason. Zechariah describes the King as **“humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** Not only is the King who comes inwardly unlike any other ruler, but he is also outwardly unlike any other ruler.

The Jews of Zechariah’s time expected a great and mighty king to restore the grandeur of the glory days of old, but the Lord promised that the coming King would be **“humble.”** Kings weren’t humble. They were strong and mighty rulers who trampled and destroyed their enemies in battle. They certainly didn’t ride a common beast of burden like a donkey, let alone an unbroken colt. Kings didn’t take their chances with such a wild animal.

Yet that’s exactly what you see in the promised King who comes. The unlikely King comes humbly setting aside his heavenly glory to become a human being and taking on the lowly form of a poor servant. Though miraculously born of a virgin, people consider him to be the son of an outcast. He grows up in poverty as the adopted son of a poor carpenter, but doesn’t have a rags-to-riches story like so many presidential candidates.

No, even in adulthood he has no place to rest his head as he travels from town to town proclaiming the good news of sins forgiven. His closest friends are uneducated fishermen, seedy tax collectors, and even a zealous radical. The lowliest of society consider him a friend and there’s nothing outwardly impressive about him. What you might consider his greatest moment of kingly glory is nothing more than a brief, triumphant ride on a saddle of coats covering the back of an unbroken donkey through the streets of Jerusalem, where days later he allows himself to be betrayed, arrested, brutally beaten, and to suffer a criminal’s death. Truly the King who comes is an unlikely king!

...But why come so humbly? Why not crush and dominate and destroy like so many other rulers over the years? This unlikely King comes to fight a battle, but the outcome is unlike any other. **“I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”**

The unlikely King comes to proclaim peace to the nations. The King who comes has no need for worldly weapons. He has no need for chariots or war horses, tanks or bombs or armies or navies, because his Word brings peace between you and God. You see, that humble King came to Jerusalem to win the war for you, to crush sin and Satan and death for you, to bring you peace by the shedding of his blood and the victory of his empty tomb.

The unlikely King comes to bring you peace, to speak peace through his Word into your hearts. Jesus explained that on the night he was betrayed, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** (John 14:27 – NIV84) Unlike every other president or king or ruler, this King brings real, lasting peace back into our sinful world. He brings the peace of forgiveness that frees your heart of the guilt of your sins. He brings the peace of strength so you can stand firm against every attack on your faith. He brings the peace of joy that flows from knowing he did it all for you.

The unlikely King brought you peace when he cleansed you of your sins in the waters of Holy Baptism and made you his beloved child. He brings you peace in the soul-nourishing food of his Supper. He brings you peace as his message of peace brings life to your dead soul and the souls of those around you, even using

your weak, faltering voice to expand his spiritual kingdom to the ends of the earth with true peace one soul at a time. No king or ruler or dictator or president could ever accomplish that.

Thankfully Jesus didn't come to be president or Caesar or monarch or tyrant. He didn't come to win an election or support a political party's platform. No, Jesus is the unlikely King who comes to be your holiness, your Savior, your humble Lord, and your Prince of Peace. To that unlikely King, let your loud hosannas ring! Let your heart be filled with joy, because this unlikely King comes to win the war for you! Amen.