

**+ Matthew 21:1-11 + Fix Your Eyes on Jesus—The Humble King! +  
+ 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +  
+ 9 April 2017 +**

Jerusalem was shook up. The city was already bursting with tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the known world come to commemorate the Passover—God’s deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Every street in the city bustled with activity, but the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth was like an earthquake. **“Who is this?”** Who is this man riding into the city on a donkey with ancient songs of praise on the lips of the people? Who is this man who comes so triumphantly, yet so humbly? What has he come to do? Why are the people praising him? How will the Romans react? **“Who is this?”** Confusion was everywhere, especially among the locals, but the answer they received wasn’t all that helpful. **“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”** The pilgrims knew he was somebody great, somebody worth praising, but they had no idea who Jesus really was or what he was so humbly, yet triumphantly coming to do. Was he a teacher? A prophet? An earthly savior? The Messiah? They were all confused.

Who is Jesus? There’s still a lot of confusion today. It all depends on who you ask. Most people acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth did exist, but many will tell you that the “real Jesus” is shrouded in myth—no more than a regular guy with some great qualities whose followers made him out to be something he really wasn’t. Many will tell you that he was a great moral teacher, but no different than any other “great” teacher or philosopher. Some say he was a revolutionary. Others say he was tragic because he died standing up for his ideals in the face of brutal oppression and jealous hatred. Some might say he was the greatest liar of them all or a lunatic...or perhaps even our Lord and Savior, truly God and truly human, but like all those people in Jerusalem, so many don’t know who Jesus really is. How about you? Who do you see making his way down that steep Mount of Olives road into Jerusalem? **Fix your eyes on Jesus and see the Humble King!**

He only had a mile and a half left to go. Many days, many years had led to this day when Jesus finally entered Jerusalem for the greatest battle in human history. His journey had started all the way back in the Garden of Eden when our first parents disobeyed God’s holy command, yet in grace, received the promise of a Savior who would crush Satan’s power forever. The final leg had started 33 or so years before when an angel informed a young Jewish virgin named Mary that she was going to be the mother of the Son of God. The home stretch began weeks before when Jesus briefly revealed his glory on a high mountain. Now he only had a mile and a half of road left to go between a little village called Bethphage and the ancient city of Jerusalem.

It was only a mile and a half. Jesus could’ve easily walked right into the Holy City with all the other Passover pilgrims. He wasn’t worn out from the journey. He didn’t need to take a load off, but Jesus was no ordinary pilgrim making an ordinary Passover pilgrimage. He couldn’t walk into Jerusalem unseen amid the masses crowding into the city. That’s not what had been foretold. About 500 years before, the Lord had foretold this important day through his prophet Zechariah, **“Tell Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king is coming to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”**

Of course, Jesus knew this, because the prophet’s words were his own. So Jesus sent two disciples into Bethphage with very specific instructions. **“Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her foal. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once.”** Pretty specific instructions! He didn’t say, “When you get into the village, look for a livestock dealer. Try to get the best deal for the best ride and bring it back to me. If you don’t find one, head over to Bethany and see what you can find there.”

No, Jesus described exactly what they would find—not just any donkey, but **“a donkey tied there with her foal.”** Jesus instructed his disciples to untie and bring a particular donkey and her foal to him, but he also anticipated the very real objection that would follow. “Hey! What are you doing with my donkeys? Why are you taking both of them?!” If you were in that owner’s sandals, you’d probably think this is some kind of grand theft donkey, but Jesus knew what would quiet their objections. **“Say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once.”** The Lord was just going to borrow them briefly and have them return right away. Jesus knew that the owner would gladly loan out his donkey and foal for the Lord’s use. Amazingly, the disciples didn’t question Jesus at all. They did everything Jesus asked them.

Now stop and think about what we’ve just seen and heard. Jesus has just predicted in detail exactly what his disciples would find, what the owner would say, and how he himself was going to fulfill the prophetic Scriptures. Who is this, making such a perfectly fulfilled prediction? This isn’t a liar or a lunatic. This isn’t even a lucky guess. This is Jesus who knows what his suffering and death are going to do to his disciples. So in this way, Jesus

assures them that not only is he the all-knowing God, but he also guides all things even down to the last detail about riding a donkey into Jerusalem.

The disciples **“brought the donkey and its foal; then they laid their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.”** According to the Gospel writer Mark, we find out that they saddled up the foal. That means instead of riding the adult donkey, which would’ve been used to bearing burdens, Jesus chose to ride an unbroken foal into pilgrim-packed Jerusalem. Perhaps its mother was brought along to calm the foal, but either way, we see another glimpse of who Jesus is—the all-knowing, all-powerful God, yet also a humble King.

Why was Jesus entering Jerusalem? He was fulfilling the ancient prophecy that **“your king is coming to you.”** So why enter Jerusalem so humbly? Of all the rides available throughout Israel, Jesus chose to ride an unbroken foal. He came **“gentle and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** Of all the saddles in Israel, Jesus sat on the cloaks of his disciples—not much more than a little padding. Then there’s his red carpet or perhaps we should describe it as his earth-toned carpet. **“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road; others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road.”** Jesus’ “red” carpet was made out of used coats and leafy branches lopped off of palm trees. By all appearances, there was nothing regal or opulent about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem.

Many thought he was coming to throw off the Roman oppressors and claim the ancient throne of King David, who once ruled Israel. Even some of his own disciples thought that, but what a pathetic image for one who was supposed to destroy the Romans and establish a world empire—a lowly man riding on coats on the back of a young, unbroken donkey.

Why did Jesus come so humbly? He was no revolutionary. He was no earthly savior. He had no plans to become an earthly king with an earthly kingdom, but he did have a purpose. You see, Jesus had a battle to fight, not with any human empire or ruler, but with sin and Satan and death. Jesus came to endure suffering, not because he had an idealistic cause, but because that was the necessary path to save you and me. Jesus came to die a criminal’s death not for his sins, but for yours. Yet though he would allow his enemies to take his life, victory in that final battle was already his. Jesus had to be a real human being like you and me to be the Savior we need. So the King humbly rode into Jerusalem as the city shook with his praises.

For a brief moment, many in those crowds recognized Jesus for who he really was. Zechariah’s ancient prophecy gives us a hint as to why the city reacted the way it did. **“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious...”** (9:9) Listen to the ancient songs of the people, **“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”** The pilgrim crowds rejoiced because here was the kingly Messiah. **“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”** Here was the One coming to Jerusalem righteous and victorious. **“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”** Here was the Son of David coming **“in the name of the Lord”** to fight for their souls. **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”**

Countless pilgrims took their most expensive, most prized possession—their cloaks—and placed them on the dirty ground for this Jesus and his nervous donkey and so many other feet to walk over. They cut down branches from the trees and laid them on the ground or waved them in the air praising the King who was coming to save them. Here was their Savior-King! Here was their victorious Messiah! At that moment, they couldn’t praise Jesus enough. **“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”**

...But it didn’t take long for them to forget the reason for their singing. When the locals asked, **“Who is this?”**, all the crowds could say was **“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”** That’s it. No description of him being the Savior. No claim that he was the Messiah, and days later many from those same confused crowds would call for his crucifixion.

After Jesus had slowly made his way down that steep Mount of Olives road and across the Kidron Valley to the East Gate of the temple complex, he got off the donkey. The foal and its mother went safely home as the Lord had promised. The disciples shook off their cloaks and put them back on. As the palm branches started turning brown on the well-traveled road, the crowds went back to their Passover business. After all, the Passover lambs of sacrifice needed to be chosen and slaughtered. The Humble King had come to finish the war that had started so many centuries before. The final battle would rage in an upper room, in a garden of olive trees under the stars, on a cross planted on an ugly hill, and finally in a tomb that would not be able to contain its occupant. This week we have front row seats to watch that terrible and glorious battle play out before us again.

...But who will you see suffering and dying and rising again? You could be like the crowds confused by who Jesus is or you can let Scripture show you that Jesus is far more than a teacher, far more than a prophet, far

more than an example, far more than an earthly messiah. Jesus is the all-knowing and all-powerful God, who is also human, yet without sin. That makes him your Savior and mine. So fix your eyes on the Humble King and see him fight for you! ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*** Amen.