

“The Humble King”

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Matthew 21:1-11

“When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” ¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Of course Jesus would have made the people happy if he had ridden into Jerusalem on a horse! It would have confirmed their messianic hope that a military savior had finally arrived. But Jesus didn't come to make people happy. He understood his mission. So he made meticulous plans to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and, for those who had eyes to see, they knew in a heart-beat he was coming as a humble king. Jesus was coming to bring a peace that could never be realized by the edge of a sword. The *triumphal entry*, as we call it, was a prelude to the triumph of a King that came offering himself as a suffering servant. *Who would have ever imagined that?*

Today, as we wave our palm branches and sing praise to Jesus, we might be tempted to ignore the suffering that would come later in the week and jump forward to the Easter celebration. In her book, Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith, Anne Lamott writes, ***“I don’t have the right personality for Good Friday, for the crucifixion. I’d like to skip ahead to the resurrection. In fact, I’d like to skip ahead to the resurrection vision of one of the kids in our Sunday School, who drew a picture of the Easter Bunny outside the tomb; everlasting life and a basketful of chocolates. Now you’re talking.”*** (Page 140)

I have a hunch most of us identify with Annie in her desire to focus on “basket full of chocolates” and not on the suffering of holy week. While our gospel centers on the parade, did you catch the line about turmoil? ***“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’*** To this day there continues to be turmoil swirling around Jesus. It is no coincidence that Jesus chose the Passover to reveal himself as the humble king. Jerusalem was a political and spiritual powder keg during Passover. The city was full of pilgrims who had come to celebrate the freeing of their ancestors from slavery. Their hearts were full of patriotism and their minds were hopeful of liberation from their current oppressor, Rome. During Passover the governor of the entire province moved his headquarters from Caesarea to the city in order to take direct command of the army. And the governor brought plenty of additional troops to squash any rebellion.

It was into this perilous and combustible arena that Jesus came riding on a donkey. The people came out in mass to cheer Jesus as a king. No doubt the hosannas, the emotional displays of people waving palm branches and taking off their coats in honor of Jesus caught the attention of the authorities. Even though there were no cell phones to record and transmit the potential uprising, the authorities had their spies reporting Jesus’ every move.

The next move of Jesus that was immediately reported to the authorities was Jesus over turning the tables of the money changers in the temple. This caused a major disruption in the flow of money from the holiday tourist trade. Jesus’ provocative parade into Jerusalem and his blatant assault on the religious establishment were two strikes against him and the week was just getting started. Even Jesus’ disciples must have been scratching their heads!

¹⁰**When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"** But Jesus knew who he was and what he was about. Jesus knew that the shadow of the cross was looming over the Palm Sunday parade. Jesus knew why he had to stir things up and confront the political and religious authorities. Jesus knew why he had to make himself vulnerable in the holy city. Jesus knew the cross was coming!

Have you heard of Bryan Stow? Bryan was recently in the wrong place at the wrong time and was wearing the wrong clothing. Bryan, an avid San Francisco Giants baseball fan, after attending the opening day game in Los Angeles between the Dodgers and Giants, was nearly beaten to death by a couple of punks in the parking lot. He continues to hover between life and death in a LA hospital. *How does Bryan Stow's senseless beating and Holy Week relate?*

If Holy Week was simply made up of a joyous parade and a glorious resurrection, there wouldn't be much of a connection to Bryan Stow. Let's admit it.....it's tempting to focus on the positive and hop from one happy experience to another and pretend as if "everything is beautiful in its own way." Some have dismissed the Christian faith because they think our faith is totally disconnected from the reality of a raw world. Those who assume there is no connection between Christianity and the "real world" don't understand that to get to Easter one must go through Good Friday.

Those who have heard me preach for very long, know that I refer to Christians as Easter people. But being Easter people does not mean we live in denial of the suffering of Good Friday. As Easter people we recognize that we live in a Good Friday world where Bryan Stows are nearly beaten to death because they are wearing the other team's colors, where suicide bombers kill innocent civilians, where babies are born with heart defects, where hard working people go bankrupt, where relationships sour and die and where.....put in your own story of hardship and suffering. We know we live in a Good Friday world but we also know Sunday's coming!

One of the reasons I am a Christ follower is because Jesus Christ demonstrates that God chose not to be a distant kind of God who passively sits back and watches the world going to hell in a hand basket? We Christians believe that, through Jesus Christ, God enters human suffering, experiences human suffering, weeps with those who weep and even feels the pangs of God forsakenness and the grief of the loss of a dear son.

Christ not only dies for sinners, he takes on the suffering of the world....he carries our suffering to the cross. Fred Craddock, a down-to-earth teacher, story teller and preacher, seeks to illustrate the meaning of the cross in a sermon entitled, “*Why the Cross?*” in his book The Cherry Log Sermons (page 83). He describes that common life experience of a child who falls down and skins a knee or elbow and comes running to mother....

***“The mother picks up the child and says—in the oldest myth in the world—‘Let me kiss it and make it well,’...She picks up the child, kisses the skinned place, holds the child in her lap, and all is well. Did her kiss make it well? No. It was that ten minutes in her lap. Just sit in the lap of love and see the mother crying. ‘Mother, why are you crying? I’m the one who hurt my elbow.’ ‘Because you hurt,’ the mother says, ‘I hurt.’ That does more for a child than all the bandages and all the medicine in the world, just sitting in her lap.*”**

***“What is the cross?” Craddock asks. “Can I say it this way? It is to sit for a few minutes in the lap of God, who hurts because you hurt.”*”**

The holiest of weeks begins with a joyous Palm Sunday parade and ends with a glorious celebration of Easter hope and new life. But whatever you do this week take some time to stand beneath the cross of Jesus and ponder his amazing love....love that took your suffering to the cross. His amazing love has and is redeeming your pain, your suffering and your very life! Hosanna, for the humble king who rode into Jerusalem knowing that the path he chose would take him to the Good Friday cross!

Amen