

## ***Humble King***

Meditation on Matthew 21:1-11

(April 9) "Palm Sunday" 2017

*When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying 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. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup> '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.' <sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The 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!' <sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' <sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'*

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On Friday, when I learned of the U.S. missile strike on Syria in retaliation for the Syrian leader's use of chemical weapons on his own people, I did what I could do to foster love and peace in a broken, angry world. Though I usually work from home on Fridays, I went to the church to help in our preschool. The classes had planned Easter parties and egg hunts and they were short staffed because of illness. My whispered prayer, from a heart heavy with sorrow, was, "Lord, what do you want me to do today? How can I help someone in need?" For God knows that we are strengthened and encouraged when God uses us,

even in what we think are small ways, to help others. Some of my greatest blessings have come from taking time in my busy schedule to visit with the children participating in our children's ministries. Let us not forget that the Lord brought them to us to love and nurture in the faith!

Jesus was often taking time from what others might see as "more important" ministry--teaching and preaching --to heal someone who was sick, blind or lame and bless the children. In Matthew 19:13-15, families are bringing little children to Jesus so that he might *lay hands on them* and pray. And his disciples scold them! Jesus says, "Let the children come onto me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he "laid his hands on them" before going on his way. Jesus ministers to children on other occasions, too, such as when he raises from the dead Jairus' little girl in Mark 5 and inspires a small child in John 6:9 with a few loaves of bread and fish to share them with a hungry crowd. How wonderful and special that child must feel when Jesus prays and multiplies *his* gift to feed a multitude--and there's food left over!

On Friday, I talked with, listened to and comforted children. I helped kids find Easter eggs and retrieved candy that fell out when they were opened. I pushed children on swings, washed and dried hands, poured and cleaned up spilled juice, and urged children to eat their sandwiches, grapes and carrots, and save the sweets for "later." I opened Lunchables, fruit snacks, and cracker packs. And I helped put the children down for naps, patting their backs. I did what I could do to foster love and peace,

even while knowing that what I did--and what other kind volunteers did that day to bless the children and staff at the preschool-- wasn't enough to fix a broken, angry world.

I did what I could, knowing that it is in the giving, loving, serving, and peacemaking that I find strength and hope to carry on, praising our Savior, our humble king, who gave his life to save us all.

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On this day, we remember what some Bible scholars call the “Triumphal Entry” of Jesus. The imagery of the cheering crowd, singing psalms and the people laying down their cloaks for him to show their loyalty would stir Matthew’s Jewish-Christian audience to connect this procession with the anointing of King Jehu in 2 Kings 9:13: “Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, “Jehu is king.” Christ’s entry into Jerusalem is also reminiscent of Judas Maccabeus entering the city and being welcomed after an important victory in 1 Maccabees 13:51: “On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred seventy-first year, the Jews entered it with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.”

The procession may also remind Jewish readers of the Maccabees’ triumph over Antiochus Epiphanes and the “cleansing” of the Holy Temple. Antiochus, around 175 BC, profaned the Temple, offering

swine's flesh on the altar, making sacrifices to Zeus, and turning the Temple chambers into brothels. 2 Maccabees 10:7 says, "Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place." The passage that immediately follows the Triumphal Entry in Matthew seems to support this claim that Jesus intends to cleanse what has been profaned. For in Matthew 21:12-13, Jesus drives out all who are selling and buying in the temple, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those selling doves.

Jesus' mode of transportation reveals that he has no intention of becoming a worldly king. He arrives on the foal of a donkey, not on a warhorse, like the kings of his time. By riding on a foal rather than an adult donkey, Jesus is proclaiming that he is the Messiah! His entry fulfills the vision of Zechariah 9:9, when the prophet sees the "king" coming to Jerusalem "humble and riding on a donkey, the foal of a donkey." Additionally, a foal hasn't been broken or ridden, making it suitable for a sacred purpose. In Numbers 19:2 and Deuteronomy 21:3, the heifer used in ceremonies of cleansing in the Temple had to be an animal that had never been yoked or worked before.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem when the population of the city is at its highest. He comes during the Passover, when more than 2 million pilgrims have come to worship in Jerusalem. This is according to a Roman governor's census of the number of lambs slain for the Passover, assuming one lamb fed about 10 people. Jesus arrives as the city recalls and gives thanks to the God who hears their cry in Exodus, saves them

from slavery and oppression and leads them to the promised land.

The Jewish crowd, oppressed by Roman rule, cries out “Hosanna!” which means, “Save (us) now!” This cry could be addressed to a worldly king or to their God, such as in Psalm 118:24-26: “This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord, do save (*hosanna; save now*), we beseech you ...do send prosperity. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!”

Whatever Christ’s reasons for making his entrance to Jerusalem in such a manner that all eyes of the city would be focused on him, his disciples’ joy reveals their lack of understanding of where this journey will end, though Christ has warned them. In Matthew 20:18-19, Jesus tells his disciples, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.’

While Jesus’ Galilean followers rejoice that Jesus is the “Son of David,” the “whole city of Jerusalem,” is in “turmoil,” asking, “Who is this?” While the crowds declare Jesus a prophet from Nazareth, the cross looms ahead!

The humble king rides into Jerusalem on a mission of love and peace, to die and save (us) now!

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Friends, I urge you to continue Christ’s mission of love and peace by serving God and neighbor every day, as I challenged you for these 40 Lenten days. Serve him with your gifts and talents and possessions, not

because your good works are needed for your salvation but because you love the Lord and want to obey. Serve and give --use what God has given you to bless others, especially people in need. And remember the children here at our preschool, Kids Klub, Tremendous Tuesday suppers, Sunday school, and VBS. Jesus found time in his demanding schedule to bless the children, though the disciples wanted to shoo them away. For it is in the giving, loving, serving, and peacemaking that you will find strength and hope to carry on, praising our Savior, our humble king, who gave his life to save us all.

**Let us pray.** Holy One, thank you for your love and for sending Jesus, our humble King, to be the Savior of all people. Help us, Lord, to continue your Son's mission of love and peace, bringing hope to the hopeless, light in the darkness, life to what is lifeless. Forgive us for our angry, violent ways. Rescue those in harm's way around the world, living in war-torn areas, homeless, hungry, and without adequate medical care or clean water. Give wisdom, courage and humility to our leaders. Lead us to walk in righteous paths. And we pray for the Church, Lord. Help us to nurture the children that you have entrusted to us. Build up and grant healing to our preschool staff. Help us to raise up more volunteers with gifts to serve in children's ministries so that we may be a blessing to many and draw others closer to you. In Christ we pray. Amen.