

“Who is This?”

Psalm 118:15-29, Matthew 21:1-11

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Psalm 118:15-29

¹⁵Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: “The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! ¹⁶The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!” ¹⁷I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

¹⁸The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. ²¹I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ²³the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! ²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

PRAY

Everyone loves a parade, don't you??

Have any of you been to the Thanksgiving Day parade in NYC? The Rose Parade in Pasadena? That is a remarkable experience: the roses are magnificent, the workmanship on the floats is incredible. Everything is decorated completely with “natural ingredients”. Amazing.

In addition to the floats, there are numerous drum and bugle corps, antique cars, dance and drill teams, horse-drawn carriages, and equestrians. My personal favorite are the marching bands!

There are a couple of things that are purposely omitted from the television broadcasts: the people who follow the horses with giant pooper scoops and wheelbarrows, and the regular but unscheduled delays due to floats that experience mechanical breakdowns.

When a float cannot continue under its own power, tow trucks parked along the route are ready to be pressed into action. But sometimes there are long pauses, during which all the parade participants must simply remain in place and wait along with the rest of us.

Once when such a delay occurred, it happened that the group stalled right in front of us, was the UCLA marching band. Realizing they had a captive audience; they made the most of it! They played lots of Christmas tunes, encouraged the crowd to sing along, and even took requests.

Then the UCLA pep squad got in on the action, leading the crowd in various cheers, drumming up lots of enthusiastic participation. We found ourselves chanting loudly for UCLA, who would later in the day compete in the Rose Bowl football game.

Mind you, neither of us attended UCLA, nor were we fans. We were just caught up in the crowd's excitement and joined right in.

Imagine a similar scene: Jerusalem at Passover. The population of the city would more than triple during Passover, everything was crowded. There was excitement in the air. The Romans, take advantage of the opportunity to stage their own military parade, showcasing their superior power and might. The point? To intimidate the citizenry and visitors with an impressive show of force to make it perfectly clear as to who is in charge!

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the city, another parade is forming. Jesus is orchestrating this one. He gives his disciples very deliberate instructions for them to retrieve a previously unriden donkey.

Why does Jesus want a donkey? Why not an impressive chariot drawn by a massive stallion?

What is Jesus trying to communicate (non-verbally) with his choice of transport? In contrast with the Romans flexing their militant muscles, Jesus rides a donkey as a symbol of peace. He is NOT the conquering hero; he is the Prince of Peace.

Unlike previous occasions when the people begin to shout and call him the Messiah, today Jesus does not tell them to be quiet or to keep it secret. No.

Today the truth will be paraded through the city.

But who will receive it? Who will believe it?

This is a moment of truth: Jesus' true identity is revealed.

Have you ever watched the television show, "Undercover Boss"? The company CEO goes undercover as a new employee in his/her own company to get a firsthand look at who his/her employees are and to grasp the actual day to day challenges that they face. It is revelatory - a reality check! If the CEO is paying attention, s/he learns a great deal and often makes significant changes based on recommendations of the employees.

At the end of the episode, is the 'great reveal': Those with whom the boss has worked are invited into the boardroom. The boss shows up as himself/herself. More often than not, the employees react with "shock and awe".

In some ways that is metaphor for what God has done in sending Jesus into our world as a human being. Through the incarnation, He identifies completely with us and experiences all the same joys, sorrows, frustrations, and challenges that we experience. When Jesus' true identity is revealed, it is too much for some. He is misunderstood. He is crucified.

It appears that the people are rallying around Jesus, giving him the royal treatment! They shout a royal greeting, part of an ancient Passover song:
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"

They carpet the road with their cloaks, and wave palm branches like cheerleaders wave their pompoms.

They shout: "Hosana!" which means "Save us!"
"Save us", but from what or from whom?

Caught up in the contagion of the crowd, the hopes and expectations of the people rise. They are giddy with joy. They hope against hope that perhaps, this Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior, the Coming king; the one promised by the ancient prophets.

But we all know that the celebrity who is popular today, is easily forgotten tomorrow, abandoned to history in a heartbeat.

Those in this crowd, shouting his praises, will be shouting "Crucify him!" before the week is over.

People are unpredictable. Tides turn, it is a temporary triumph. Jesus knew things would change.

Still Jesus acts deliberately in this moment, always obedient to his Father's will. He does so to fulfill the OT prophecies, specifically this one in Zechariah 9: 9-10.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses 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.

Jesus was secure in his identity. He knew who he was. He would be true to his identity and to his purpose, the reason for which he came: "To seek and to save the lost..." "To give his life as a ransom for many."

According to Matthew's account, the crowds raise this question, regarding Jesus: "Who *is* this?" (21:10)

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?" They respond:

"Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:13-14)

Like people in the crowd on that day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, there were many different ideas about him. If Gallup had taken a poll, the results would be mixed. No clear consensus. No overwhelming majority opinion.

If we took a poll today, I imagine the results would be similar.

Jesus was a great moral teacher.

Jesus was a healer and miracle worker.

Jesus was a controversial figure who was crucified as a traitor to Rome, a rebel.

Jesus was a lunatic, a delusional demagogue. He thought he was God, after all!

Each person - then and now - must answer this question for him/herself.

Each one in the crowd that day, and in this congregation today must answer:

"Who *is* this?" Jesus asks: "Who do YOU say that I am?"

We have an advantage over those in the crowd that day. We know "the rest of the story." We know, not only the betrayal, the denial, the fake trials and floggings, the brutal hours on the cross that Jesus endured until he breathed his last on Good Friday. We know "the rest of the story". We know that he was buried, entombed for three days. We know that "Sunday's a comin'"!

But the folks in the crowd that day, were clueless. They knew none of this. Still, it is up to us to answer this question for ourselves: "Who *is* this?"

Jesus lived, died and rose again - all for love. Love for you and for me.

⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. I John 4:9-10

Jesus deeply desires a personal relationship with you. It's not good enough to rely on the faith of a parent or grandparent, a spouse or best friend. You must decide for yourself and answer for yourself this question: Who is this Jesus?

Jesus himself said: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

It is as easy as A-B-C:

- A- Admit that we are sinners - imperfect people in need of God's grace and in need of a Savior.
- B- Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, place our faith and trust in him, as Christ alone is worthy of our trust.
- C- Confess or acknowledge Christ as your Lord and Savior...Jesus himself said: *³²"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)*

When Jesus asked the disciples: But who do YOU say that I am?

Simon Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:15-16)

Who is this man?? How shall you respond?

PRAY