

There were two parades that week. We usually only talk about one.

The one with the donkey. With the cloaks and the branches. The hosannas and the children. It's a humble, ragtag, not at all impressive kind of parade. It's the one that made it into our Gospels, our church liturgies, and our palm-waving, parading reenactments.

But there was another parade happening on the other side of the city.

While Jesus entered from the east, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor and would-be king, was likely coming from the west. Pilate didn't ride a donkey; he arrived on a war horse or in a chariot, surrounded by armored and armed soldiers. His military procession featured gold-gilded chariots and soldiers marching in formation, boots pounding the ground.

It was a show designed to send a message. *Rome is watching. Rome is in charge.*

This was an annual display of imperial power meant to remind the Jewish people, especially during Passover, the time when they celebrated their liberation from Egypt, that any dreams of freedom were better left as dreams. Caesar was still king, and anyone who forgot that would be crucified as a reminder.

And in a world like that, when you live under systems like this, the very act of survival itself can feel like resistance.

This day, Jesus enters the city on a donkey, not a stallion, not a chariot, but a simple, lowly donkey. This is not some cute story we tell each year. It is a protest. In a way, it is performance art, divine street theater.

Jesus' ride mocked the parade on the other side of town. And not just mocked it, but undermined and subverted it. I mean, the contrast is so stark. Real power, the kind that Jesus has shown us, does not need to intimidate, overpower, or silence to be powerful.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, "*God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family, and that love is stronger than force.*"

And that is just what this strange little parade is about.

Because the Kingdom of God somehow looks like a Galilean peasant riding a borrowed donkey, surrounded by kids, peasants, and women with tambourines. It smells like sweat, joy, and dust. It sounds like hope.

And that is the point, because Jesus is the kind of king who shakes our ideas of what kings are supposed to be.

And if we keep reading in Matthew, this procession does not stop at the city gates. It heads straight to the Temple, where Jesus starts turning over tables. And it's interesting to note that this is one of the few moments we get the same story (or a very similar one) in all four Gospels. Which is often how theologians signal that this really happened and that it really matters.

Because the parade we choose has consequences.

The people shouting Hosanna that day were not naive. *That word does not mean hooray; it means **save us**.* They were pleading with Jesus.

Save us from this Empire. Save us from the violence. Save us from the oppression, the taxes, the abuse. Save us from leaders who do not know what it is to care.

They thought Jesus might be that kind of liberator, the one who would overturn Roman power and take back their temple and their land. But Jesus was not coming to defeat Caesar by becoming Caesar. He was coming to do something far more subversive.

He was coming to undo the whole system. Not by force, but by love.

Let's be honest. If we had been in the crowd that day, we might have chosen Pilate's parade. Pilate's parade promises security. Pilate's parade assures, "No worries. You are safe as long as you fall in line."

But Jesus' procession is the parade for the poor and the weary and the sinners and the doubters and the ones who keep getting left behind.

Howard Thurman once called them "*the disinherited*", people who live with their backs against the wall, people who know what it is to be pushed aside, overlooked, or silenced.

This is the parade for people who carry wounds. For people who carry shame. For people who are trying so hard to believe God loves them.

It's the parade for people like us.

Jesus does not ride in to take power. He rides in to redefine it. He does not conquer with violence. He surrenders in love. He does not sit on a throne made of gold. He hangs from a cross made of wood.

And here is the question of the moment. Who in their right mind would choose a king like that? A king who bleeds. A king who loses. A king who forgives even from the cross.

Unless....

Unless you are a people who have been wounded by all the other kings. Unless you have stood at the edge of empire and watched as it trampled everything you loved. Unless you have realized that what the world calls strength is really just fear in armor.

Then maybe, maybe a crucified king is the only one you will ever trust again.

And maybe that is the point.

Because the kind of king Jesus is, the kind who chooses humility over power, love over dominance, is not what we expect.

But it is exactly what we need.

Jesus is the kind of king who rides straight into the city that will kill him. The kind of king who rides a donkey, not because he has to, but because he wants to show us a different way to live. A way of peace. A way of humility. A way of love that is so stubborn, it survives even death.

And somehow, this is how God changes the world. Not by crushing enemies, but by refusing to become one.

So today, dear friends, we have a choice.

Will we follow the parade of power or the path of peace?

Which king will shape our lives and our world?

May we have the courage to follow the humble King.

Amen.