

April 5, 2009
Palm Sunday

"Kings Jesus Rides Triumphant on a Donkey"

MARK 11:1-10

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" ⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" ¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

Have you ever been close to the Queen of England? I have. It happened in Santa Barbara in 1983 when she was scheduled to visit with President Reagan on his Santa Barbara Ranch. Because of the huge storms that year she was not able to arrive on her royal yacht in the Santa Barbara Harbor. Instead, she flew into Santa Barbara from Los Angeles. Susan and I decided at the last minute to go to the airport and see the queen when she arrived. We never made it because of the crowds and the blocked off roads, so we parked along Fairview Avenue, never even thinking that her limo would pass right in front of us. We waved and she waved with a big smile through the darkened glass, probably more interested in our son Joel who was about the same age as her first grandson little Prince William. Imagine the international uproar if President Reagan picked up the queen of England her royal majesty, in his old WW2 jeep that he used on the ranch.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem, as King of kings and Lord of lords on lowly donkey, a humble beast of burden. The greatest kings and queens of the world have kneeled down and bowed their heads at the name of Jesus, including the Queen of England, who stood so royal and majestic, dressed in pink, as she greeted the president of country this past week. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. In preparing for this sermon this past week I was amazed at how much attention the gospel of Mark gives to the donkey which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. There is a message that Jesus wants to give the world, and it is not a subtle hint. He wants us to know beyond any doubt how he has come to humble himself and become obedient to death on the cross just so people like you and me, who are so undeserving of God's love, can spend an eternity of glory with him.

On this Palm Sunday, when people all over the world are singing their loud hosannas to Jesus, I invite you to see King Jesus riding triumphantly on a lowly donkey, not ashamed to be your Savior. I invite you to listen to the crowd sing their hosannas for they have a message we need to hear.

Look at how he rides into Jerusalem

How amazing it was that Jesus carefully planned his ride into Jerusalem on a young donkey that had never been ridden before. As he approached the city of Jerusalem he sent two disciples ahead of him to make arrangements to find a donkey. "Go into the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here." Jesus also gave them careful instructions on what to do if someone asked why they were taking the donkey. "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back shortly.'" It all worked out just as Jesus had carefully planned. They found the colt outside of the village tied at a doorway. They untied the cord that kept the donkey from wondering off. When someone asked why they were taking the donkey, the two disciples simply told them the Lord had need of it and he would have it returned later.

How did Jesus know where the donkey was, and how did he know the owner would let his disciples bring the donkey to Jesus? Jesus knew all things because he is God. Jesus is omniscient. That is a big, fancy word for knowing all things. Psalm 139 says that the Lord knows us when we sit and when we stand, he even perceives our thoughts from afar. Because Jesus was God he could see where the donkey was tied. He could even see how the owners would react when the donkey was untied. In John 10 Jesus says, "I know my sheep, and my sheep know me." No one knows better what you are going through right now, no one knows better than Jesus. As we sing in the hymn, "Jesus knows my every weakness, take it to the Lord in prayer."

The disciples untie the donkey and bring it to Jesus. Notice it says, "They brought them to Jesus. It was the colt, and also its mother who were brought to Jesus. The colt had never been ridden before. All of this fulfilled the amazing prophecy from Zechariah that said, "See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of donkey." It says they placed their clothes on the colt that had never been ridden before. They did not place their clothes on the mother which was much easier to ride. Ever try to ride a young horse that has never been ridden before? It is not easy. Jesus miraculously rode this donkey that had never been ridden before, proving he is Lord and God.

Jesus never used his power as God to save himself, or make life easier for himself or even make the painful suffering less when he went to the cross. This morning, on this palm Sunday, we see Jesus use his power as God to subdue this young donkey not for his benefit but to help us see a prophecy fulfilled. He also helps us see more clearly how Jesus is doing everything necessary to humble himself and become obedient to death. Look at the face of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem. See how determined he is to rescue you and save, and how much he loves. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross and the shame."

To help us appreciate even more how Jesus rode into Jerusalem with great determination to rescue us, I am holding in my hand a piece of rope. This account in Mark mentions several times that the colt would be tied with a rope. The disciples had to untie the rope and bring it to Jesus. Later Jesus would be tied with a similar piece of rope after he was handed over by Judas to the religious leaders. He would be tied up and taken to the Jewish leaders, then to Herod, and then to Pontius Pilate and finally he would be taken to the

cross. Jesus let himself be bound, because he wanted to be handed over for our offences or sin and raised for our justification, raised to declare us not guilty. You and I are born into this world bound and tied to our sin. Nothing can break us free from the sin that will drag us down to eternal death. No one can rescue us and we cannot rescue ourselves for the book of Psalms says, "No man can redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him." Your only hope is Jesus who rides into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey as Lord and God.

This past week two men were standing outside and they noticed in the house nearby a little girl about three playing in the open window on the third story of the house. They rushed over to see if they could help the little girl before she fell. Just as they got there she fell from the window and they were able to catch her and keep her from serious injury or most likely death. They happened to be in the right place at the right time. Jesus just didn't happen to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and happen to die by some tragic stroke of justice as some claim, and happen to be there at the right time and place to rescue you. No, as we look at Jesus sitting on the donkey we see him determined to go to the depths of hell itself, even being forsaken by his own Father just so we can be free. It was all so carefully planned down to taking care of the nasty things you have done wrong this week, and even the secret sins that are deeply embedded that we never even see or realize. "What punishment so strange is suffered yonder, the Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wonder."

Listen to the loud hosannas he receives

How did the crowd receive Jesus as he made his way down the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem? We are told "many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread the branches they had cut in the fields." When the Queen of England comes to visit our country she receives what we call, "The Red Carpet Treatment." When she steps off the plane, she steps on to a red carpet that welcomes her to our land. The people welcomed Jesus and honored him by laying down their cloaks in front of Jesus as he rode on the donkey. They took green branches and laid them down in front of him. At Jesus' time palm branches were symbols of victory. Early Christians buried their dead with palm branches in their hands and had palm branches carved on their tombs. Instead of a red carpet treatment, Jesus received a green carpet treatment with green branches of trees and palms branches symbolic of a victory celebration.

Along with palms came the psalms. They welcomed him with a victory song they knew from their childhood days, a song they heard sung many times in the temple and in groups that made their way to Jerusalem. "Hosanna! Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest!" The word "Hosanna" means "Lord save us!" It comes from the great Psalm 118 that begins with the words, "O give thanks unto the Lord" and contains well known verses such as "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it" and "I will not die but live." They shout for joy because they have high hopes that Jesus will bring back the blessings of the Kingdom that King David enjoyed.

The people of Kenya have an expression for very important people like the Queen of England. They call them "WaBenzi." They are called "Wa Benzi" because they ride in luxurious cars like the Mercedes Benz. Jesus was not a Wa Benzi. He rode on in majesty on a lowly donkey. He rode on to die.

How did Jesus welcome their cheers? The book of Luke tells us he burst into tears and said, "If you, even you had only known what would bring you peace- but now it is hidden from your eyes." Have you lost sight of the peace that only Jesus can give? Your King riding on a donkey knows your problems and troubles. He knows your health problems, your financial concerns, your weakness of faith, your lack of confidence in yourself, the down days in your life. His greatest concern is the huge debt of sin that we could never pay, a debt that condemns every human being to eternal death and punishment. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, let himself be taken to the cross, let our sin be placed so he could cry from the cross, "It is finished."

Someday all the problems of this life will be wiped away and we will stand around the throne of the Lamb with palm branches in our hands rejoicing forever in the victory Jesus won for us when he rode into Jerusalem. On that day every knee shall bow in heaven and earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.