

## “Humble and Riding on a Donkey”

Matthew 21:1-11

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What really strikes me about the Palm Sunday story is the picture of humility. The One who has come to rule in our hearts, comes as an incarnation of humility. When other kings made their grand entrances, they arrived with pomp and circumstance, with mighty armies, with crowns and spears and other symbols of power.

But Jesus enters the Holy City on a donkey. For he has not come to be a political leader, not a ruler of nations; but a sovereign of the heart. Jesus has come to rule and to dwell in our hearts. Can we picture the humility of this scene? Can we hear the sound of it? Taste the taste of it?

Humility is such a contrast to the world's idea of a great ruler. Yet, humility is how God is revealed to us. Jesus' birth is painted as a picture of humility in a stable behind an inn. His whole life is a picture of humility, not coming to be served but to serve. So, it is fitting, it's in keeping with his character that his entrance into the city near the end of his life would also have a humble feel.

I love the way artists have painted Jesus on that donkey. One artist paints his eyes with an expression that says, “You need to talk? Sure, I've got time for you.” Another artist paints his hands which seem to be beckoning to the crowd, “Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Yet another artist paints Jesus on the donkey making him look like everyone else, wearing regular clothes, regular sandals, as if he fits right into the community.

This king, this Jesus king, rules in our hearts. To rule in our hearts is to make our hearts like his, full of humility; full of the desire to love somebody who hasn't been loved lately; full of the desire to be a servant helping a neighbor; full of the desire to understand how another person is feeling. That's the kind of ruler Jesus wants to be, the kind who plants the seeds of humility and then waters those seeds and then rejoices whenever those seeds produce people who live humbly.

I'm sure we all know people we would identify as humble. These are people who are Christ-like. They have found that acting humbly is the secret to a joyful life.

At this time of year, I always recall the day I got the phone call that my dad was at Bay State Hospital in Springfield. He was awaiting emergency surgery for a life-threatening brain tumor. I jumped into my car and headed up route 91 north. Along the way, I realized I didn't know which exit to take for the Baystate Hospital. So, I guessed. I guessed wrong. I was totally lost. Up ahead, I spied a man who appeared to be homeless. He was pushing a grocery cart full of old clothing. I decided to take a chance. I rolled down the window, called out to him, "Do you know the way to Baystate Hospital?" He must have seen the look of panic on my face, probably sensed the desperation in my heart. Calmly, he set his grocery cart aside, stopped whatever he was doing, and slid into the passenger seat of my car. Very calmly, he guided me to the hospital. Before I could thank him or hand him some money, he was out of the car and gone.

Later, I thought to myself, “I think I encountered Jesus out there on the road.” That man was the most humble man I had ever met. He had no silver or gold. What he did have was compassion. He had time to help a lost soul. In that moment, nothing else mattered to him. So, when it comes to Palm Sunday and to Jesus riding on a donkey, I think of that man. His donkey was his grocery cart. His spirit was the spirit of Christ.

It’s always wonderful to be told how handsome we are or how beautiful we are or how athletic or how musical or how creative or how intelligent. But in the end, the highest praise comes when someone notices how humble we are.

So, theologically speaking, Palm Sunday is a celebration of the humility. When we wave our palm branches, we are celebrating this profound gift so desperately needed in our world today. For whenever we notice someone acting humbly, that’s when we know we’re living in the greatest of hope. Amen.