

# Sunday Message 5 April 2020

## WHAT WE LEAST EXPECT - A King on a Colt?

### Matthew 21:1-11

1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 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. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 “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.”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 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!”

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Our Lenten series, “What we least expect,” finishes up today as we join Jesus on the last leg of his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, and we join “A King on a Colt?” But we could reasonably call this week “On the Road with Jesus.”

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I’ve been spending a lot more time on the road during these coronavirus days. One day this week I was crossing out of our subdivision, getting ready to cross Franklin Road. There was a small car coming down Franklin Road, observing the speed limit. I had just started across the road when I heard (rather than saw) a LARGE SUV kick down, pull out, and pass the small car on a DOUBLE YELLOW LINE. That LARGE SUV was going easily 75 mph by the time it roared past where I almost crossed.

Large SUVs weigh on average 2.8 tons and have between 350 and 400 horsepower under the hood. They are anything but sport (given their monstrous mass), and anything but utility (with their leather upholstered captain's chairs, their climate control systems, and their "available video entertainment systems." That one hurtling past me was like a small elephant being thrown at hurricane speeds, bellowing its protest.

Can you imagine what that would have been like on that first Palm Sunday, if there had been an impatient large SUV coming up behind Jesus and his motley band of children, old women, and long-haired young radicals. It probably would have sounded like this, inside that large SUV. (Talking on a cell phone to a friend) "I don't know what this is. There's some kind of parade blocking the road down the hill. I can't see around it. There's some guy on. Little white donkey, old ladies, kids running around crazy waving tree branches, and a whole bunch of hippies. I think I can get around 'em, the shoulder is empty here on the left . . . Maybe I can just push through (slams on the brakes) sheesh, some kid just jumped out in front of me . . . (Accelerates as old ladies begin gesturing - angrily - somebody beats on the side of the SUV) I gotta get through this. I'm gonna be late to the city. That guy on the little white donkey is just staring at me. I can see him in my mirror!"

Do you know there were at most three people in all of Palestine who could have asserted that much power on that first Palm Sunday, forcing Jesus band out of the way (Pontius Pilate, King Herod, and the Roman occupation force commander). Do you know how many LARGE SUVs are registered in the USA, going back only seven years? 25 million! 25 million Americans have at the touch of their toe more power than almost anyone in Jesus time.

Why was Jesus on a white donkey colt? Why was the coming Messiah not on a war horse? The answer is in Zechariah 9:9 (Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey) and Zechariah 14:4 (On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem). Jesus chose to come powerless, riding a beast of peace. In rabbinic tradition that colt is called the "Messiah's Donkey." The meaning is demeaning -

the “Messiah’s Donkey” is the one who does the dirty work. Jesus rode the “Messiah’s Donkey” down that hill to do the dirty work no one else was willing, no one else COULD, do.

And what did “Hosanna” mean? That is what this motley crew cried, in all the accounts save Luke’s (Luke 19:38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” - quoting Psalm 118), the crowd cries “Hosanna.” In Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic it means the same thing - save now! The crowd was ready for the Messiah to do what the Messiah was supposed to do - save his people from the oppressor - the occupying Roman army. Jesus came to save his people, but not with military power. He came to save humanity from a far more dangerous enemy - sin, and death.

So, what happened when Jesus got down the hill? In today’s Gospel it says, “When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’” (Matthew 21:10-11). Mark’s Gospel says, “Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve” (Mark 11:11). John’s recounts, “The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!’” (John 12:19).

My favorite conclusion is in Luke’s account. “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’” (Luke 19:39-40). Again, Jesus chose powerlessness. He chose, as Paul states in Philippians 2, “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God something to be held on to, but he emptied himself . . .” Jesus chose to be as all of really are in these days of uncertainty - powerless.

As I trotted on down the road that day, I came upon one of those big orange signs, “One Lane Road Ahead.” On down the road I came upon FIVE monstrous utility trucks - two boom trucks, two crane trucks, and a huge hydraulic drilling truck - all to put in one new utility pole. There were a half dozen workers milling around, all in orange vests, yellow helmets, jeans, work boots, and beards. One of them was

in the road, directing traffic, with one of those two sided signs, the kind with “Stop” on one side, and “slow” on the other. When he saw me trotting down the open lane, he flipped his sign and held up “slow.” He grinned and gave me a “thumbs up.” I was slow, and I felt oh so powerless.

Right next to me was over a thousand horsepower, monstrous and overpowering. You don't realize how huge they are until you're slowly trotting past them.

Back in 1415 in France there was a battle fought between the French and the English - the Battle of Agincourt. In that battle 26,000 French troops were chasing the retreating English army, no more than 6000 troops, mostly (80%) Welsh longbowmen. The English King Henry V fought in hand to hand combat (to protect his wounded brother, the Duke of York, who died) and lost the crown off his helmet to a French axman. When the six-hour battle ended, 6000 French lay dead, including over 1000 French war horses, and all their mounted knights, and squires, all their princes, many counts, even an Archbishop. It was the cream of French power. The English suffered the loss of 600 troops. It was one of the most ill-matched battles in the whole medieval period, with the most unexpected outcome. And it was won by common laborers using the tools they used to provide for their families back home in Wales, the longbow - these who were looked down on by the powerful warhorse mounted Princes of France.

Jesus chose the powerless way. Jesus could have called down all the powers of heaven. He chose to take the way we all really walk, and offer himself for us, for our sin, to be obedient, even unto death. Will you join Jesus where he is? Will you join the ones he comes to save. Will you choose to give up your foolish power and join the Lord of life? Will you?