

Matthew 21:1-11

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

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

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

That’s My King

Matthew 21: 1-11

One of the big events that everyone looks forward to in Banner Elk happens around the first week of October when the college celebrates homecoming. On that particular Saturday, there are all kinds of folks in town. Alumni from many different graduating classes come back to visit the college and have reunions. They come to revisit some of their favorite places and relive memories with old classmates. There are special events and special dinners and you never know who you might see. I remember running into students from 20 years ago, who showed up with their children in tow, and feeling really old as a professor. Sometimes you just didn’t recognize them and were always amazed by the way their lives had turned out.

One of the really special events that happen on that Saturday morning is the Homecoming Parade. Now being a small college in the mountains brings a certain flavor to a parade. We didn’t usually have enough entrants from the student body so there was always room for the high school band and the Kiwanis Club and maybe the horse riding group in town. We only have the one stop light, for crying out loud. There were usually some old cars as well as some really new cars for the homecoming queen and king; there are kids on bikes all decorated with streamers, and at least one fire engine.

And of course, at the end of the parade is Santa Claus, who apparently didn’t have any other parade to be in and Christmas was only a couple of months away anyhow. As we stand along the side of the road we wave and clap our hands and holler at those we know and hope they will throw candy to us which turns all of us, young and old alike, into scrambling screaming children. Just gotta have that tootsie roll or those milk duds! It is peaceful and fun with no hint of danger. Norman Rockwell in all its glory.

Not so for Jesus and his parade this morning. This was an entirely different kind of parade. Although I'm sure there was a lot of laughter and noise and confusion and probably children as well, that's where the similarity ends. For suddenly in the midst of this Passover weekend there comes down the road a man on a donkey and colt with his disciples and followers throwing down their cloaks in the road in front of him and shouting "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Nancy Rockwell in her commentary shared this. She says "He rides in straddling two donkeys, according to Matthew, one a colt, the other its mother. He planned this 'entrance': funny as a late night comic, awkward as a clown's pratfall, not piously humble but mocking, like Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, refusing to enter into the pomp and circumstance of the Games because she knows they are rigged. It is death she is challenging. And it is death Jesus is challenging, in the Jerusalem Games."

Jesus isn't just fulfilling a prophecy this morning, he is making a statement. A statement about who is really the king of your life; king of your heart. We don't like to think of Jesus being a political person but this parade, this entrance into Jerusalem, is as political a statement as one could make and it will cost him his life.

There's evidence now of two processions that day in Jerusalem according to Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book, *The Last Week*. Jesus' was the counter-procession, stealing the pomp from Pilate's ceremonial procession. The Roman battalion, solemnly advancing through the western Damascus Gate, on the Syrian Road...Awesome stallions...Clanging hooves against the paving stones...Gleaming metal lances. Swords, dirks, helmets. Polished leather armor, saddles, boots. Drums.

Pilate was marching his men into Jerusalem because the Jewish Feast Days were beginning, and that stirred a restlessness in the people. He was sending a message, any trouble would be crushed. The Pax Romana, Caesar's peace, would be enforced.

At the Beautiful Gate, on the opposite side of town, coming in through an olive grove, rode Jesus, alone, sitting on a donkey, one leg draped over her colt, someone's old cloak under him. Laughter and foolishness brought travelers together into a waving crowd, good naturedly throwing palm branches in the rutted path. This was the gate legend held, was the one through which the Shekinah (the dwelling spirit of God) brought the Sabbath each Friday at sundown, and the gate through which the Messiah would one day come."

It is a culture and city that has been looking for a messiah-king for hundreds of years as we hear in the passage from Zechariah 9 that Matthew quoted, and especially when we hear in the verses that follow which say, "He will cut off the chariot from Ephriam and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea..." In these verses, we hear what kind of king they are looking for.

All those who have gathered for the Passover, the most important religious remembrance of the nation of Israel, are primed to remember the God who brought them out of slavery and brought them to the promised land and who abides with them in the Temple. They are looking for a messiah-king who will restore Israel to her former glory and throw off all those who oppress her people. To destroy the Roman overlords reign, just as the Kings of Old threw off others. They want a sword wielding, charismatic king, with an army to back him up just like the army Pilate had in front of him.

And so it should come as no surprise that the majority of people are confused and wonder aloud “who is this? What kind of king is this? If this is all he is, then we are doomed indeed.” Looks more like the king of disappointment to the crowd, and they want a more powerful option. And in the midst of all our own struggles with life maybe we want a king like that too? Someone who can right all wrongs and overthrow all oppressors and rule over us like the kings of old? Jesus isn’t living up to expectations here and we know how the rest of the week is going to go...not well. Who is this man?

David Lose shared these thoughts in his commentary. He says, “The tragedy of the day is that the people are half right. He *did* come as God’s Messiah. But they misunderstood what that meant – not “regime change” by violence, but rather the love of God poured out upon the world in a way that dissolved all the things we use to differentiate ourselves from others and the formation of a single humanity that knows itself – and all those around them! – as God’s beloved people.

The other tragedy of the day is that the religious and political authorities are also half right. Jesus was a threat. For that matter, he still is. He threatens our penchant to define ourselves over and against others. He threatens the way in which we seek to establish our future by hoarding wealth and power. He threatens our habit of drawing lines and making rules about who is acceptable and who is not. He threatens all of these things and more. But they are so wrong in thinking that they can eliminate this threat by violence. Jesus’ resurrection – which in Matthew is accompanied by the shaking of the very foundations of the earth – affirms that God’s love is stronger than hate and God’s love is stronger than death. And eventually all will yield to the mercy and majesty of God.”

And just like those who flocked to Jerusalem and the Passover, so we too, flock towards Palm Sunday, Holy week, and Easter as we remember the God who delivered us from slavery and bondage and I’m wondering what we are expecting? What kind of king are you looking for? A king of power and might like David or Solomon? A King who will draw his sword and strike down all our enemies, or a king who with the push of a button, would launch destruction upon those who oppose us? To which I’m pretty sure Jesus would say “I’m not that kind of king.”

There is a challenging parallel for us today isn’t there? As I’ve observed the last few months of our public life and discourse, I hear many who claim to be followers of Jesus, who also claim that those in positions of political-worldly power are also their king. It is a really intriguing tension that we find ourselves in, isn’t it? And I wonder, who do they follow? Who do they claim as king in their lives and how is that revealed in the way they live, and the priorities they set, as they consider the needs of others and Jesus’ call to justice and peace, grace and mercy?

Maybe you need to answer this question for yourself today. Maybe the ideas you have about Jesus’ kingship would have him saying to you as well, “I’m not that kind of king.” I’m not a king of worldly or military power. He may be what you least expected. For me, He’s a king who causes you to come out at night and ask deep questions of faith like Nicodemus. He’s the kind of king who will tell you all about yourself and get you really thinking and then offer you living water. He’s a king who will help you see things clearly because he came to bring release to the captives and give sight to those who are not seeing things clearly, and who don’t see God in the midst. He is a King that will challenge you every time you draw a line in the sand that excludes those he came for. And He is a King of unimaginable love that overpowers the deepest darkness. Or as Dr. S. M. Lockridge preached it, “His life is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never

changes. His Word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. And His yoke is easy. And His burden is light.” *The King of Love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never. I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine forever.* And like he has done in most of the gospel stories he will turn to you at some point and ask, “who do you say that I am?”

And today, and with the days of Holy week before us, I feel compelled to ask that same question to myself and to you as well, who do you say that he is? What kind of King do you think he is? Who is this? What kind of king were you expecting? Is this humble, seemingly powerless, son of David what I was expecting? I don’t know how you will answer that question. I don’t know how I will answer that question. But answer it we must, and then follow. Follow all the way to the cross and beyond. Let us pray.

Lord, there are a lot of Kings in this world who would rule with terror, might, and abuse those who are the most vulnerable. Lord Jesus, thank you for being a different kind of King. For being a King who is humble and giving, willing to walk through the calms and storms of our lives with us. Thank you for your goodness and kindness in our lives. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for your Kingdom that is unlike any Kingdom in this world. Amen!

Nancy Rockwell - @ www.patheos.com

Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan – **The Last Week – 2006, Harper One**

David Lose – In The Meantime – www.davidlose.net

Dr. S.M. Lockridge – That’s My King Do You Know Him?