

Clear the Way!

Summit- April 13, 2014

“Clear the way! Throw down your garments for the King is passing by! Line the path with flowers, with a runner of finest cloth! The Messiah, the Savior is coming! Finally!” I can imagine Peter telling John, “Finally, people finally understand who Yeshua truly IS! After three years of sleeping on the ground, bad food, no food, too much food--all those miracles.....finally, we’re going to get some recognition...This is it! This is the the Kingdom ! It’s coming.”

Others along the way are also abuzz. “Hey, we gotta see this guy! But there’s so many people! I wish I were taller! What’s that, he’s riding a donkey? A small donkey..”

Yes, like Solomon in the Old Testament, who rode into Jerusalem on King David’s mule in I Kings” 1:33, Jesus claims his messiah-ship by sitting upon a donkey for his coronation. In the gospel of John, the reference to Zechariah 9:9 is made: “ 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.” This symbolism of humility must be noted in this story. Instead of a powerful war- horse, Jesus chooses a lowly beast of burden. He rides on a colt, a donkey that was not even yet broken, and

wins the battle, though not by any military force. He rides on an untrained colt, another powerful symbol. After all, this Kingdom is not of this world. It is new and it is just beginning! His riding this colt, alongside the mother donkey, is a miracle, a final Kingdom miracle showing that “enemies are destroyed more completely by the sacrificial love than by brute force.”

Scholars speculate that there were two strands of crowds weaving into Jerusalem two centuries ago.

Last Sunday I made the statement that even while Jesus was distraught, enveloped in grief at having Lazarus swallowed by Death, he was still in control. He knows what to do and does it. In today’s triumphant entry story, we are not told if he embraced the parade. We are not told if he rebuked the crowds or if he forgave or even blessed them as he rode along. But we ARE told the reaction of the crowd. And that reaction to the leader of the Kingdom, to this first-century Palestinian who embodied Love, is what encourages us centuries later. The crowd was ecstatic, even euphoric in their cries of expectation: Save us, Son of King David! Hosanna- Hebrew for “us- HO and Shanna-Save”.

Jesus goes into Jerusalem in a big way. A wanted man, he goes straight into the fire of Jerusalem, right into the center of the bees' nest, knowing that it will end badly that day. It is the cup God has given him, and so....he is bold. He has one last chance to show what His Kingdom is all about, and so he chooses a donkey, one that is young, a colt, not broken to ride or to carry, a wild ass, as some translations describe it. If you read this event through the eyes of John, you see that Jesus' hour has finally come. Three years earlier he tells his mother at the wedding at Canaan that his hour has not come, but that was three years earlier. We know that Jesus' death warrant had been issued by Synagogue guards weeks earlier. "The whole world has gone after him," they had wailed after the fantastic raising of Lazarus.

Apart from the Jesus strand of the story, no Jewish feast was more important than the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, the "Pesach"-Hebrew for Passover. What an appropriate ending for the end of Jesus' ministry, the finale to a dramatic play. The Passover enacted the freedom from enslavement for the ancient Israelites, the beginning of the Jewish nation. This festival was one of three in which Jews were required to travel to THE temple in Jerusalem. A whole week or at the least, five days of purification were practiced before the actual temple rite. And Jesus, a Jew, arrived six days before Passover,

along with thousands of others. And he was gentle and he was humble and he was a servant.

Paul gets it when, years later, he takes an early hymn, a poem used in early church services, that he inserts into Philippians 2. (read verses 6-8) Jesus was a humble soul, not a haughty king. And Paul, starting out in verse one, says that we, too should, out of our experiencing the Spirit of God in our lives, make our lives a Hosanna. (Read verses 1-3.

Make your life a Hosanna! (Be of one mind (Phil.2:2)

What you do, what you say is important! Words can heal or hurt.

They can wrap a person in the warm blanket of love or bind them like a cold rope with one judgmental word, a phrase, an inference.

This does not say, “Everyone agree on every translation and theological point”. No, to be of one mind means to share the big stuff—that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus died, arose, and ascended into heaven. Paul wants us to know that without Palm Sunday, there would be no Good Friday...and without a Good Friday, there would be no Crucifixion and without that atonement there would beno resurrection. And as Paul says in Corinthians 15:17-19, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have

perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Who made up this crowd of thousands?

1. **The Traditional Jews.** The devout Jews and their families, coming to the Temple for their once-a –year Passover celebration. These are people who love tradition, who love the cycle of the seasons and the church year, the celebration of history in the form of the Passover. There were many people on the way to Jerusalem.
2. **The Curious.** Many had heard about his Jewish Rabbi who had multiplied one lunch into feeding thousands, and who had called back Lazarus from the land of the dead. Perhaps...MAY-be there might be a chance to see him: the Curious. They were sort of on the fence, not knowing if he was the real thing or not, but going along with the crowd. They were also the children, masters of curiosity.
3. **The Zealots:** those who KNEW--those who had been waiting for a King like David to show up to save the day: a Braveheart, who would bring Israel back to its divine place in history--Someone with miraculous powers. This Jesus might be the one, and this would be a perfect timethe insurgents. Yes, like Zechariah described the deliverer with God on his side. Perhaps...he **is** the son of God, the

Anointed One, the Messiah-I Yes, the Son of David!! David was the kind of king that made things happen. These were also people who had come to Jerusalem, but as Patrick Nafziger recently wrote in the Mennonite World Review, “Jesus came riding on a donkey, not a warhorse.” This was not comfortable for those in the crowd who wished for a conqueror, not someone choosing the cross. Why didn’t he hide, why did he just take it all in, like a lamb going to the slaughterhouse?

4. **Jesus’ followers.** He had made the rounds for three years. There were people who had experienced a Love and an indescribable transformation. These people would never be the same and they would not go back, they had been set free. They were still euphoric! There was the woman who had bled for twelve long years, there was the formerly blind, crippled, and impaired. There were the Zacheusses whose wealth meant nothing to them now, the woman from Samaria who was now known for her faith, the lepers, we could go on and on, to say nothing of the **families** of these people! It **was** indescribable. There were many who he healed back into community. And many of these had never found a way to thank Jesus. (They had no internet, no postal service, no phones.) This was a way to

perhaps get a chance to bow down to this King, to thank him, to give him the homage he deserved...yes, he WAS a King

5. **The sick and the broken.** There were those among the crowd whose maladies were apparent and some with pain that did not show. These were the ones who were not mentally or emotionally well and in need of healing, so they could stop pretending that they were all right.
6. **And finally, the curious Gentiles, the Greeks that had come to see about this Jesus weeks earlier.**

Who are you in the crowd? Sometimes I am a Zealot, like the times I still send Jesus into the fray like a Superhero, expecting him to fix things our way, to right this broken world. Often I am then disappointed when I see him beaten, humiliated, crucified, my hopes broken, scattered, destroyed. Yes, I know that only through death will come life, I know that Easter is coming, but I still mourn when Christ chooses the cross instead of a battle. Patrick Nafsiger asks a question that I also ask today: “Where are you looking for Jesus?” He turns up in the most unexpected places.

Are you the curious, the thrill-seeker? Are you the zealot, are you the ones who have been made whole? Perhaps you are the woman who simply wants to touch the hem of his garment or the man who needs a physical healing from this King of Kings. Who are you in the crowd?

I see Jesus laughing with the children in front of him, entering into the spirit of the parade, reveling with his true disciples at the coming of the Kingdom of God. How do you spread the joy (point to the laughing Christ painting) of Christ? How do you wave palm branches? Will you wave them by your refusal to participate in gossip. by consciously putting on Christ in your active listening, in your gentle, joyful words, by giving your all in attending church regularly, by holding loosely the possessions that we call ours and by giving liberally and sacrificially to those less fortunate?

Promise to talk about what it is the Spirit gives you through this service.

Take it and savor it, obey it, nourish it this Holy Week, so that we can share together next Sunday in the most joyous day of the year.

Lord, as we praise you with our words, our thoughts, our worship, our lives, make us instruments of praise and healing in a broken world. We praise you for how you will use each person open to your love and to your power this morning. Empower them to empower others through the hope you have given us. In the glorious name of Jesus, our peaceful, strong Savior, we pray, AMEN.