

## **“Riding on a Donkey”**

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First Congregational United Church of Christ, Gaylord, Michigan

Sunday, April 2, 2023

Texts: Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 and Matthew 21: 1-11

Even Yankee Doodle got a pony. You're welcome for my putting that song in your head! Humpty Dumpty even got all the king's horses to come to his aid. Horses and kings, they are synonymous. Large stallions, often pure in color, grand in stature...these are the animals a king would ride. But this king? This king of the Jews (hush, the Romans might hear you), comes riding on his “triumphal entry” not on a grand stallion, but on a donkey. Every year we hear the story. Some churches even reenact the story complete with a donkey. We think it's so wonderful. But do we miss the point of Palm Sunday? Like much of the holy week saga, we seem to miss some of the messages that are implicit in the scripture. Jesus didn't ride a donkey by accident.

It may be the case that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah (Zech 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.

In our own time, we often look to leaders who are strong, decisive, powerful, maybe rich, but we often don't reward them for humility. In fact, any sign that they are human, fallible, least of all humble, might prevent a person from being a leader today. Even in the church, we are struck by the charismatic, the powerful and often the self-important. All in the name of the humble King of Kings and Lord of Lords who came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. We just don't seem to capture what was occurring on that first Palm Sunday.

In addition to the donkey, it is unlikely that huge crowds were screaming hail to the king. To do so would have attracted the attention of the Romans, and Jesus wouldn't have needed to wait until Friday to be crucified. He would have been arrested on the spot. Can you imagine any political regime, let alone Rome, allowing someone else to be named king by a mass of people in the streets of a provincial capital?

It's likely the crowd was smaller than we think. It's likely Jesus came in a humble manner. Yes, the crowds were excited. Yes, they removed their cloaks, put them on the donkey, and even on the ground. These were poor folks. They gave of everything they had to celebrate the entry of Jesus. But how ironic that the one to whom so many in the world look for salvation, brings with him not only the power of God, but also the humility required for authentic leadership.

All I'm saying is that when we look to leaders, even of small groups like neighborhoods, or teams, or clubs, we might do well to follow the example of the Bible

humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the Highest!

Amen.