

Text: Luke 19:28-40

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Those are the words the people shout as Jesus enters Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry on what we now call Palm Sunday. We know that on Sunday the people are shouting Jesus’ praises and waving palm fronds, but on Friday, they were calling for his death. Why the sudden change? What went wrong in five short days? How did we go from proclaiming Jesus as King to yelling for his crucifixion in less than a week?

There are several reasons, but one answer is very simple: Jesus was a big disappointment. He was! The people had long been expecting a Messiah to lead them into victory, to throw off the chains of their enemies, of the Roman government, and give them liberation and the power to govern themselves as a free people. As I contemplated it this week, I couldn’t help but think of the people of Ukraine and the sense of revolt they feel – and that must have been felt by the Jewish people against the domination of the Roman Empire and the eventual Jewish-Roman wars they experienced. It is certainly understandable why they wanted Jesus to save them by military might.

Isn’t that what Moses did? And King David? They wanted Jesus to be a military leader, not a spiritual one. The reason the people waved palm fronds is that palms were symbolic of victory and military achievement. The Romans gave palms to the victors in the Roman games and emperors to their subjects. This event in Jesus’ life is called the “Triumphal Entry” – the people were hoping for a literal King to triumphantly enter into the city and save them. And we humans often seek a Savior to do battle for us – to go to war with and for us. That is what the people were seeking in a king that day. And there is still a temptation today to identify Jesus with political might or to exchange God’s Kingdom for a human kingdom and plan.

Jesus rode in as a king - but what kind of king was Jesus? Jesus chose not a mature stallion to ride – like a conquering General would ride, ready for war

– Jesus chose a young donkey. The donkey is a symbol of peace and humility and is even the subject of mocking, having been equated with less than flattering images since ancient times. GK Chesterton wrote in his poem about the donkey that it is, “the devil’s walking parody of four-footed things.” I learned this past week that the other term we use for donkey – you know the word – a jack....donkey? The word “jack” is a term for “male” and was utilized to refer to a male of lower stature in society or a male animal- a male donkey. And then donkeys have been viewed as stupid, foolish, and stubborn for ages...even though they’re very strong, brave, intelligent, and sure footed.

But contemplate for just a moment that Jesus specifically chose to ride in on a humble animal whose is associated with a significant insult. Jesus turns things upside down – because for Jesus, the donkey became a sacred throne, not just for a king, but for God’s very Son. And remember it was a donkey who carried Mary and baby Jesus into Bethlehem at the time of his birth. A donkey carries him again at the time of his death.

What kind of king is this?

Soon Jesus will wash the feet of his own disciples, like a common servant or slave. What kind of king is that?

Soon Jesus will allow himself to be betrayed by those closest to him for 30 measly pieces of silver- the going rate of a slave at the time - and then be arrested like a petty thief at night. What kind of king is that?

When confronted by the religious leaders and Roman governors, those who had power over his life, Jesus did not defend himself but went silent at their accusations, like a lamb before the slaughter. What kind of king is that?

Jesus will accept his fate, be beaten within inches of his life, and will be mocked openly and publicly. His clothes will be stripped off, his head adorned with a painful crown of thorns and spit upon. What kind of king is that?

Jesus' closest followers will deny him and pretend they never knew him. What kind of king is that?

Jesus will then accept the scourge of death on a cross, the torturous death of a common criminal. He will die suffering in this humiliating way. What kind of king is that?

If we're expecting an earthly ruler who will come to defeat our enemies and put us into a place of power, Jesus is indeed a very disappointing king. No wonder the crowds turned on him.

Jesus is a king who comes in peace and humility. He comes to show that those who would be first are those who would be last -those who would serve and sacrifice. He comes to show the power of God in the guise of terrible weakness...at his birth and his death. Jesus is a king who rides a donkey. Jesus is a King who suffers and dies – his heart broken for the sins of the world.

The Kingdom of God is not like earthly kingdoms. This is a kingdom whose locale resides in the hearts of people, it is a spiritual kingdom that ultimately conquers evil and death through love and sacrifice, not political prowess, war, or coercion.

My friends - Jesus is a King who does not take over by force, he comes only by invitation. Jesus is the King who is most deserving of glory, laud, and honor, but Jesus' Kingdom and conquering power is spiritual and takes place spiritually in the human heart- which is the ultimate battle ground. Will we, will you crown Jesus the lord and king of your life? Who or what will reign in your heart?

Jesus doesn't want to just liberate us from our temporal enemies, Jesus wants to liberate us from the real Enemy and the source and root of our deepest problems: sin, evil, and death itself! This is the triumph behind the triumphal entry! This was the battle that Jesus was engaged in. And it's so much bigger than any momentary military victory- it is eternal.

And so we wait on God in faith. Those who are willing to say yes to the ones who are willing to follow not just on Palm Sunday but on Good Friday

- in his difficult footsteps of love, servanthood, and sacrifice, those are the ones who share in this king's everlasting triumph.

What kind of King is that? The King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Amen.