

The Donkey King
Matthew 21:1-11

Many of you changed plans and stopped whatever you were doing to watch the historical moment. We did. Imagine the scene again...it was festive as thousands upon thousands of people moved excitedly, laughing, and anticipating the moment with renewed hope. There may have actually been a few hosannas spoken but the hope on many an American heart was – please help us. It was the inauguration of the president of the United States of America. The first black president ever. An event many of us recently witnessed...except we have the ability to not actually BE there and still witness the events. It was all those things...exciting, moving, powerful, historical, yet behind the moment we all knew waited a tidal wave of political rhetoric and posturing. While this new president promised change and an administration that would truly represent the people we also wondered with uncertainty as we watched...what will this mean for our country and our world? We are seeing much of the same as the past years...political nonsense.

This morning we gather to remember another inauguration of sorts. In some ways it is the same. None of us will actually be there and this event was a gathering point for crowds. Jerusalem was full of travelers. They came from all over to attend the Passover as obligated by Jewish law. While in Jerusalem the crowds buzzed with an undercurrent. People came excitedly anticipating something is about to happen that will bring change to their lives and it gave them new hope. Word on the street was that the messiah had come...this Jesus of Nazareth. It was exciting, moving, powerful, and historical. And that's the point of separation...instead spending a reported \$170 million dollars, inviting a lot of celebrities, dignitaries, and virtually every politically significant figure who arrived in limousines with unprecedented military, special and secret service protection and where literally millions of people all over the world watched via satellite – this inauguration happened one morning and the guy in the center rode a donkey...The King who change the world. While the people of the day no doubt gathered with uncertainty and wonder, full of hope, shouting the cry of their hearts – **Hosanna! God, help us! Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"**...today we know this leader and his administration has been true to his word and every one of his promises as he has met the great needs of the hearts and lives of millions. The Donkey King who really did change the world.

Just listen to what his power and government has done... Fred Winters, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Maryville, Illinois, was shot and killed during a Sunday service on March 8, 2009, by a troubled young man. A week after the tragic event, his wife, Cindy Winters, was interviewed by Julie Chen of CBS's *Early Show*. When asked about her husband's alleged killer, Terry Sedlacek, Winters spoke only a message of forgiveness—a message quite fitting the celebration of Easter:

I do not have any hatred, or even hard feelings towards him. We have been praying for him. One of the first things that my daughter said to me after this happened was, "You know, I hope that he comes to learn to love Jesus through all of this." We are not angry at all, and we really firmly believe that he can find hope and forgiveness and peace through this, by coming to know Jesus. And we hope that that happens for him.

This story dramatically represents the kingdom and administration Jesus brings to the hearts and lives of his followers. People who are willing to follow in the footsteps of a leader who knew what it meant to suffer.

This morning is called Palm Sunday and the Triumphal entry. This was the morning Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and the crowds laid palm branches and their cloaks on the ground in front of him.

I. THE DONKEY KING (21:1-5)

The crucifixion is six days away. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem knowing the religious leaders were plotting to kill him. He came anyway because there were some things he must say and do. One truly significant thing that he said publicly, was said symbolically. He rode into town on a donkey.

And why is this so significant?

(1) So far as we know, Jesus never rode a donkey before. Prior to this day, he always walked with his disciples. He ate and slept and sweated in their midst. Often he drew apart from them for prayer, but he never expected any special privilege. Now he sends them to fetch a donkey for him to ride. Why?

(2) Entering the city on a donkey's colt was a simple way to symbolize that Jesus did in fact come as king. **He symbolically stated that accepts the title.** When Solomon became king after David, he rode his father's favorite mule during the inaugural procession into the royal city of Jerusalem (1 Kings 1:33). Now, a far greater "son of David" rides into the city of kings in the same way. Matthew says "**This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet [Zechariah 9:9]:** "Rejoice greatly o Daughter of Zion Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The people of Israel were looking for their king to ride in on a donkey.

(3) A conquering king would have ridden into the city on a fearsome warhorse, or in a gilded chariot, but Jesus rode on the back of a donkey. While he accepted the title of "king," he was not the political/military messiah that the people--even his disciples--anticipated and wanted...Jesus was not the king who would militaristically defeat the

Roman rule that had dominated and choked the nation however, he was the king whose kingdom would be the hearts and lives of his followers - and this kingdom would conquer any and all opposition and oppression of the newly restored and living relationship the followers of Jesus have with God through this humble Donkey King.

(4) Jesus had specified that the donkey was to be a young colt that had not been ridden. This suggests the sacred aspect of his journey to Jerusalem. Only animals that had never been used as beasts of burden could be considered suitable for sacred purposes (Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7). The unriden animal's willingness to bear Jesus also says something about His power. Jesus is not only a king--he is a divine king. This is not a political occasion, but a sacred one.

II. THE CROWD (21:6-9)

Soon the road was jammed with pilgrims and locals alike. They joined the disciples in laying their cloaks across the path to show Jesus honor. They broke branches from the palm trees and waved them in the air, and spread them on the road. What was that all about! The last time Israel had been independent was a hundred years ago, when Judas Maccabeus defeated occupying forces of the Romans, won independence for Israel, and became king. His nickname was "the hammer," and he had adopted the palm branch as a symbol of his victory (1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7). He put the image of a palm branch on his coins, and had them used in temple feasts to celebrate the victory over Rome. When the crowd rushed to get palm branches for this occasion, it was not just because they were the only thing around.

This was so exciting because the people of Israel...all those travelers in Jerusalem expected the messiah to come bringing two great gifts. The arrival of the messiah meant salvation for God's chosen people and defeat of all of God's enemies. Israel would again be established as the envy of the world, the great world leader and power that it was under Kings David and Solomon. Jesus did indeed bring these gifts however salvation included the Gentiles and the enemy Jesus defeated was the death of sin reigning oppressively over all people

While the cloaks and the palm branches make this a royal procession, the cheers of the people are even more significant.

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!

The word "Hosanna" is a Latinized transliteration of a Hebrew phrase that means "please save!" or "help!" It occurs in Ps. 118:25, just before the other phrase used here, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Both of these quotations were used in the liturgy of the Jewish feast of tabernacles, when the people would commonly wave branches in the air and pray for God's help.

III. THE OPEN-ENDED STORY (21:10-11)

As we study this scene, we must remember that the story never ends. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people took notice. Matthew tells us that "the whole city was stirred and asked 'Who is this?'" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." As the story stirs us again in 2009...what does it mean?

When we read this story, we also ask, "Who is this?", and in particular, we must ask "Who is Jesus to me?" Much the same way as Joyce asked us last Sunday..."Why would we want to see Jesus?" Do we recognize him for who he is? Do we bow down and submit to our true King who rode into Jerusalem as humbly as he came into the world...to take a cross and die a death, meant for us? That's your King, the Donkey King.

Not \$170 Million dollars, celebrities, dignitaries and limousines...just a Donkey and a cross. I guess the cross is the hard part because following this king also means a cross for each of us. I didn't see any crosses on Obama's inauguration schedule.

Mark 8:31-36 Jesus began telling his disciples what would happen to him. He said, "The nation's leaders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law of Moses will make the Son of Man suffer terribly. He will be rejected and killed, but three days later he will rise to life." Then Jesus explained clearly what he meant.

Peter took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that. But when Jesus turned and saw the disciples, he corrected Peter. He said to him, "Satan, get away from me! You are thinking like everyone else and not like God."

Jesus then told the crowd and the disciples to come closer, and he said: If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me and for the good news, you will save it. What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself? What could you give to get back your soul?

This passage reminds us of three truths of Jesus as King:

One, he had to suffer to establish his kingdom,

Two, satan wants the church to forget about suffering, and

Three, Jesus makes it clear that not only was he to bear a cross...but each and every one of his followers.

Taking up our cross does not mean some eccentric Christian lifestyle or ethical posturing. It means whole-hearted, single minded Christian devotion, commitment, and obedience to Jesus and his will. It means to live is to live for Jesus. And that kind of living will lead us into his passion to bring salvation to the world. Jesus made it clear that we can not live for this world with its priorities and standards AND live for him at the same time

((What kind of follower are you?)) **It is clear that many pilgrims would get in behind Jesus** on the road to the throne, but they would not follow him on the way to the cross. They would wave palms before the coming king, but they would not follow the Suffering Servant. I wonder if some of those who shouted hosannas on Sunday were shouting “Crucify him” on Friday

Jesus knew to climb on that donkey and ride among the shouts of Hosanna was not going to be a gala affair. His inauguration was to lead him to suffering, rejection, and complete abandonment but also to the greatest victory in the history of humanity. Climbing on that Donkey meant what 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us...”God made him who had no sin to be sin in our place so that in him we might be made right with God.” And he knew it.

It was now or never...It is a day in history that speaks to Christians of every age.

Perhaps you sit here this morning -now a witness to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and inauguration as king – wondering with some uncertainty...what does it mean that Jesus desires to enter into my heart and life as my King. There is only one way the Donkey King arrives and it is as king with no room for any other kingdoms.

The two completely contrasting inaugurations give us a great insight into what is on the table this Palm Sunday morning...they present us with a great question...what kind of king do you want Jesus to be?...A paper King who represents the promise of gaining the whole world or one who would bring everlasting life and a cross.

You choose