

**“Who Is This”**

April 10, 2017

Dr. Frank J. Allen, Jr., Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

**Matthew 21:1-11**

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

**4** This 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.”

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; **7** they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

**8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

**9** The 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!”

**10** When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

**11** The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## WHO IS THIS?

Who is this guy riding on a donkey?

That's the question our anthem for today asks (will ask).

And this is the question asked by all of the gospels.

Who is Jesus?

The story is told in different ways.

But the same question is asked in all the gospels.

Who is Jesus?

The Bible looks at this question from various perspectives.

What do the people say?

What do the disciples say?

What do the religious and political authorities say?

Answers vary depending upon who you ask.

But, no one got it completely right.

Not even the disciples.

Earlier in Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist sends disciples to Jesus with this same question.

Are you the Messiah that we've been expecting or should we expect someone else?

And Jesus replied,

"Here's a hint.

The blind receive their sight,  
the deaf hear, the lame walk,  
the dead are raised, lepers are cleansed,  
and the poor have good news preached to them."

That's a strong hint, but at that point in the story Matthew does not tell us directly.

## NOT THE MESSIAH THEY EXPECTED

On the one hand, the disciples and the crowds want to know who Jesus is.

But, on the other hand they seem afraid to know.  
They want to cheer him on,  
but they're not so sure about his agenda.  
Jesus says some things that sound really weird to them.

If Jesus is the Messiah, he's not the Messiah the people have been expecting.  
He is much more.

And his presence is always earth shaking.

For example, when Jesus stilled the storm,  
it did not inspire the disciples to greater faith.  
Instead, they asked in fear,

"Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

The actions of Jesus display the power of a prophet,  
the authority of a king and the compassion of a priest.

But, there's more to Jesus than someone who claims to be a prophet or a priest or even a king.

Jesus did what only God could do:  
Raising the dead, healing a man born blind, helping the lame to walk ...

And Jesus said what only God could say.  
"Your sins are forgiven."

That last part really rankled the religious leaders.  
"How can this guy forgive sins?  
Who does he think he is ... God?"

Well ... if the shoes fits ...

The actions and teachings of Jesus turned the ancient world upside down.

Everywhere Jesus went the people still asked the same question.  
“Who is this guy?”

## A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Today’s lesson gives us another answer to this question.  
Who is Jesus?  
Who is this guy?

He’s the guy who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Now you may well ask,  
“Why is that important?”

We can understand the importance of raising the dead or enabling the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

But, why was riding a donkey into Jerusalem so significant?  
Surely people rode into Jerusalem on a donkey all the time.

Matthew’s gospel helps us understand this key detail.

Riding into town on a donkey was not spontaneous.  
It was calculated.

The details in the story make it plain that Jesus was entering Jerusalem in this way on purpose.  
He told two of his disciples,

“Go to the next town.  
In that town you’ll find a donkey and her colt.  
Untie them and bring them to me.

If anybody says,  
‘What are doing untying these animals?’  
Tell them, ‘The Lord needs them.’”

This was prearranged.

Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey to make a powerful symbolic statement about who he was. Jesus is making a claim about himself and his ministry.

Who is this riding on a donkey?  
He's the King.

To emphasize this point Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah.

“Your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt the foal of a donkey.”

Who is Jesus?  
He's the king you've been waiting for.  
He's the king that was predicted by the prophets.

Can't you see?  
It's as plain as the nose on your face.

He is your king.  
He comes to you humble and riding on a donkey.

We know the people understand this because they begin to treat Jesus like a king.

They throw their cloaks on the road.  
They cut branches from the trees and lay them in the road.

And they run behind and ahead of Jesus shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**TURMOIL**

So how do the people of Jerusalem view this royal procession?

They are scared to death.

The Bible tells us that the whole city was in turmoil.  
The word translated “turmoil” is the same word used to describe an earthquake.

The people of Jerusalem were shaken by this parade and the appearance of Jesus.

I think that the Romans might not have known what it all meant.  
They had no knowledge or for that matter interest in the prophets of Israel.

In fact, if that had known the symbolic importance of Jesus’ action,  
they probably would have killed Jesus on the spot.

But, the people of Jerusalem knew.

And so they asked in disbelief,

“Who is this guy?  
Who does he think he is?  
Doesn’t he know that such demonstrations can be dangerous?”

Later in the week the Roman governor will face a crowd that is determined to crucify Jesus.  
But, Pilate, strangely enough is reluctant to put an innocent man to death.

So he asks the crowd,  
“Shall I crucify your king?”

And the frightened folks in Jerusalem will tell Pilate,  
“We have no king but Caesar.”

The crowd that followed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday didn’t have any doubt about the identity of Jesus.

Who is this man?  
“He’s Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet.”  
And by his actions he’s also the king  
... the Son of David come to deliver his people.

Praise God!

That was a very dangerous thing to claim.  
It created a turmoil.

And the turmoil, the earthquake started by this procession into Jerusalem will only intensify in the days to come.

Jesus will drive out those who are buying and selling in the Temple.  
He will turn over the tables of the money changers and say that the religious leaders have made the Temple into a den of thieves.

He follow that up with a series of scathing parables that highlight the hypocrisy of those same religious leader.

And the healing will continue.  
Except now the healing will occur in the Temple.  
And when Jesus heals the blind and the lame in the Temple, the little children will cry out in response this these miracles in a way that is reminiscent of the procession into Jerusalem:

“Hosanna to the Son of David.”

I suspect the adults knew better than to cry out like that ... especially in Jerusalem.  
They knew what Herod and the Romans would do to those who tried to crown someone else king.

Those despots weren't looking for miracles.  
They were just trying to retain power for their own glory.

But, the children got it right.  
Their natural reaction to the miracles that they had witnessed told the truth.

The religious authorities did not respond well to this.  
In fact they were angry.  
And they wanted Jesus to put an end to such talk.

They said to Jesus,  
“Do you hear what these children are saying?”

Don't you know that children should be seen and not heard?

It's dangerous.  
Tell them to be quiet."

But, instead Jesus affirmed their message.  
Quoting Scripture he said in effect,

"The children seem to know more than the adults.  
It's like the Good Book says,  
'Out of the mouths of babes the work of the Lord is praised.'"

## THE JESUS WE DO NOT KNOW

Who is Jesus?  
They all had it partially right.

He is Son of David.  
He is king.

He is a prophet.  
He is a priest.

But, he is more.  
He is the Son of God.  
And he has come to do more than just shake up the folks in Jerusalem.

He has come to shake all of us up.

You think your life is in a turmoil now  
... just wait until Jesus arrives!

Like those who first asked the question, our understanding of Jesus is incomplete.

Who is Jesus?

He is always more than we expect.  
And he's always different from what we expect.



A while back our adult Sunday school class studied Philip Yancey's book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*.

Philip, a former editor of Christianity Today, grew up in a Bible believing evangelical church.

But, as he got older he realized that his image of Jesus was influenced by cultural expectations as much as it was by the Bible.

The Jesus he never knew  
... was the Jesus actually portrayed in the Bible.

Yancey wrote,

"No one who meets Jesus ever stays the same.  
In the end I found the process of writing this book to be a great act of faith-strengthening.

Jesus has rocked my own preconceptions and has made me ask hard questions about why those of us who bear his name don't do a better job of following him."

I understand.

After preaching for many years, the message of the gospel still has the power to rock my world. Instead of having a "settled faith," the Jesus I discover in the ancient Scripture each week is in many ways a surprise.

It's not just a matter of knowledge.  
It's not just a matter of right doctrine.  
It's a matter of faith and a willingness to follow our Lord.

## A HUMBLE KING

The religious authorities knew the Scripture.  
In fact, they had the Scripture memorized.  
They knew all the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah.

And yet they rejected Jesus.  
We can understand why this might have happened.

Perhaps their perception was clouded by fear.  
Maybe they wanted to retain power.  
Perhaps they truly thought that the claims of Jesus were blasphemous.

But, I suspect a big reason that they couldn't see Jesus was that they missed one important part of the prophecy about the coming king.

What did the prophet, Zechariah say?  
Yes, the king comes,  
and Jesus is claiming to be king.  
Yes the parade into Jerusalem was meant to turn things upside down.

But, notice *how* the king comes.  
He comes *humble* and mounted on a donkey.

These are, for us, two contrasting ideas.  
Whoever heard of a humble king?

That's like a short basketball player.  
It can happen.  
But, it's very rare.

We assume that humility is for those who have no power.  
Many certainly do not think this is a good characteristic for a king or world leader.

A strong leader rides the war horse.  
A strong leader is not afraid to use force.  
Right?

What do you think would happen to a president who emphasized humility instead of power?  
That person would be ridiculed and ignored.

They would crucify him.  
Exactly.

Kings and humility don't go together  
... except when it comes to the kingdom of God.

## TAKE UP A CROSS AND FOLLOW

Yancey asked in his book why we don't do a better job of following Jesus.

The answer, in part, is that Jesus asks us to follow a path that is very difficult and dangerous.

Our anthem for today ended (will end) with these dramatic words about Jesus.

He is a "wiling and humble sacrifice" who "rides on to die".

That's true.

But, what does that mean for us?

It means that if we ride with Jesus into Jerusalem, we will be a part of the turmoil.

The ground beneath our feet will shake.

What does it mean to follow a king who is humble?

We've heard it many times.

It means to take up our cross and follow him.

All three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) have this command.

If you want to follow Jesus, you have to deny yourself and take up your cross.

We all do have a "cross to bear".

Jesus told us that.

But, we sometimes get confused.

The cross of Christ is often not the cross that we claim.

Our cross is not the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune".

Our cross is not the misfortunes that come the way of every human being.

Our cross is the cross of self-denial.

The contrast seen in the entry into Jerusalem is also seen in the lives of those who choose to follow Jesus.

We are royalty.  
We are children of the heavenly king.

But, we ride on a donkey.  
We are humble.

Paul's letter to the Philippians helps us understand what it means to follow this humble king.  
He wrote that our attitude toward others should be guided by the life of Christ.

Instead of claiming the glory of heaven Jesus became one of us.

He was crucified by the very people he came to save.

And this humble sacrifice changed everything.  
The power of the gospel, the power of Christ is the power of humility.

In a way the idea of a king riding into town on a donkey seems ludicrous.

But, it's no joke.  
It's a sign of the coming of God's kingdom.

The power of the cross is the power of humility.

That's the way our king rode into Jerusalem on Sunday long ago.  
And that's how Jesus rides into our life today.

This humble king creates turmoil.  
He's earth shaking.

Spoiler alert.  
Bigger earthquakes are on the way.

Watch this space.  
Next Sunday ... 8:45 and 11:00!