

IYKYK

Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 31:9-16 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Matthew 21:1-11

MATTHEW 21:1-11

¹ 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 fulfil 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.'

INTRODUCTION

IYKYK. IYKYK is an acronym frequently used in online posts, text messages, memes, or hashtags, courtesy of Generation Z. It means *if you know, you know*. And it is used to indicate private knowledge or an inside joke, some context that the sender and the receiver share that most others may not understand. If you know, you know. I would give you an example but, by definition, any example would be only for someone in on the inside joke, and alienate most of you. And you all know me well enough to know that I would never say anything up here to try to get you to laugh. Right? If you know, you know.

This morning, I want to focus on the reading from Matthew's Gospel we heard related to the palms, the so-called Triumphal Entry. We will have plenty of time to consider the Passion in the coming days—and I would encourage you all to be here in the coming days as Holy Week is upon us. But as we consider this little story, I think Matthew is trying to get us to see something, something that the astute reader will know, if you know, something subtle and yet profound, something concealed and, yet, obvious: Jesus boldly declared himself king, and so bravely welcomed certain death. Matthew's argument here emerges from the character of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem along two themes—the provocative action of Jesus' triumphant entry, and the modest mode of his triumphant entry. In other words, alliteratively, we will consider the chutzpah of his entry, and the humility of his entry. Let's take a closer look.

1. THE CHUTZPAH OF JESUS

The first thing that we might have noticed in Matthew's version of this story, something somewhat unique to him, is the introduction of this theme of fulfilment. There are, in fact, two fulfilments here. First, Jesus sent two disciples into the village ahead, telling them quite specifically that they will find two donkeys, a mother and a colt, tied up. And when they are asked, Jesus tells them, they are to say the Lord needs them and they will be granted permission to use them. This is a remarkable story. There is nothing to suggest that this was somehow pre-arranged. And I do not know the last time you grabbed a random bicycle off the rack and, when confronted by the owner, you responded with 'the Lord needs this' and they let you take it. But

this is not a common thing. Yet, for these disciples, it happened exactly as Jesus told them it would. This strangely specific set of circumstances came about, exactly as foretold. It is no wonder, by the end of our passage, the crowds are declaring him to be a prophet.

But the second fulfilment is even more interesting. Matthew grounds it in a unique quotation from the prophet Zechariah: *“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.”*¹ This is important because the prophecy is Messianic, foretelling how the Lord will come and save his people by sending his righteous king. That biblical context, of a prophet some 500 years earlier, suggests that Jesus knows exactly what he’s doing. He’s orchestrating events to fulfil precisely what the prophet had written—revealing that he sees himself as the messianic king. This is a bold move. This is a provocative action. And by the end of the chapter, the leaders of the people will be plotting to have him arrested for it. As the Yiddish would say, it takes a lot of chutzpah for him to enact events in a way that declares himself to be the king of Israel, the conquering king entering his capital city, like Charles III in just a few weeks, riding through town in an elaborate coronation procession. Yet, this is precisely what Jesus does. If you know this context, Jesus is being quite clear. There is no hiding or concealing it. If you know, you know. Jesus is the triumphant king.

2. THE HUMILITY OF JESUS

And yet, his chutzpah is not the only quality of his entrance into Jerusalem. There is also his humility. Two things about this. First, that’s the word (πραῦς) that the Zechariah quotation uses—*“humble and riding on a donkey.”*² But interestingly, this is a relatively rare word for humility—a concept which usually indicates lowering oneself. The word here is used as an adjective just four times in the New Testament, three of them in Matthew.³ And it carries a sense of lowliness, to be sure, but also a sense of being rejected or outcast, looked down upon, burdened, humiliated.⁴ When Jesus says, earlier in Matthew—*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*—it is not about the meekness of his appearance, but about the humiliating work in front of him—that which we heard about in our Isaiah reading.⁵ The imagery here, that of two donkeys, two beasts of burden, is not about the low estate of those particular animals, but about the weight that the animals bear, the burden they carry. Even the context of the Zechariah quotation makes that clear—the king has come to bring salvation at great cost to himself. And so, when Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, it is not so that he can feign entering like a peasant or put on the appearance of one who is lowly. It is about the burden he bears, the humiliation he is about to face, the death he is about to die—so poignantly captured in our Philippians reading.

Secondly, for their part, the crowd seems to have understood, perhaps even more than they realised. They shouted *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*⁶ This is, itself, also a quotation, this time from Psalm 118. And again, the context here is important. Psalm 118 is the song of a man in distress, surrounded

¹ Matt 21:5. See Zech 9:9.

² Matt 21:5.

³ The word is also used 16 times in the Old Testament. The noun—πραῦτης—seems to be a bit more common.

⁴ See Job 24:4, 36:15; Joel 3:11, and Zeph 3:12. See also Matt 5:5, where the word πραῦς is translated as *meek*.

⁵ Matt 11:28-29. See Isa 50:4-9a.

⁶ Matt 21:9. See Psa 118:25-26.

by his enemies, falling, in need of desperate help.⁷ His exclamation of *hosanna*—which itself literally means *pray, save us*—is sensible. Like the Psalmist, the crowd is crying out for help. This is not merely a joyous processional with cute palm branches as banners and jubilant exclamation by children—palms and children not actually mentioned in the text, by the way—welcoming the Davidic king.⁸ It is actually a plea for help, a recognition that the king entering Jerusalem here is one that brings salvation, just at Matthew recorded at the beginning of his Gospel when Joseph was told: “*you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*”⁹ You see, this was not simply a triumphant coronation procession, but the beginning of a funeral procession, a death march that just five days later will include carrying a cross on which he will be crucified. And why? It is so that his desperate people might be saved from their sins, from their evil, from lives lived in rebellion against God. It’s easy to get caught up in the pageantry, but Matthew wants us to see this important context so that we might understand the burden that Jesus carried into Jerusalem that day. If you know, you know.

3. THE HOSANNAS OF THE PEOPLE

Chutzpah and humility. And now Hosanna. Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that makes a bold claim of his kingship, and yet in a way that showed he faces certain death. And as we heard in the Passion reading, that death comes just a few days later. As *we* now enter into Holy Week, the final week of Lent, the final week of Passiontide, take the time to consider what this means for you. We are sinners. Whether we realise it or not, we are fundamentally sinful, living lives of deception and self-importance, telling little lies and harbouring hateful thoughts, indulging in secret lusts and giving in to feelings of envy, inclined to think of ourselves first and at the expense of God and others. Some of us may not even realise just how desperate we are. Perhaps this is the week, the first time even, when we might come to terms with our own sin, and then truly shout *hosanna, pray, save us*, and turn to the king who gave his life for us, the one who bore our burden of sin and triumphed. I would commend that to you as you journey this week toward Easter—knowing that the first steps are to recognize our need, and to pray that Jesus might save us. And if you are already there, then do not forget he is not only our Saviour, but our king. It is time to live under his rule, to live as his subjects, to live lives worthy of being subjects in his kingdom—for he has truly earned his reign through sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

Jesus boldly declared himself king, and so welcomed certain death, so that we may arrive at Easter Sunday as God’s redeemed people. If you know, you know. So let us shout *hosanna* and mean it. “*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*”¹⁰ For our Saviour has arrived.

Let me pray. *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming to us, as triumphant king over sin and death, but also as the Saviour we desperately need. May we turn to you in our need, and then live according to your rule. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

⁷ See Psa 118:5, 10-13.

⁸ Palms are only mentioned in John. See John 12:13. Despite the hymn, children are not mentioned in any Gospel.

⁹ Matt 1:21.

¹⁰ Matt 21:9.