

Humble, Mounted on a Donkey

Zechariah 9:9-10

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Most of them rejected their king when he came. It was not because they had not been told of his coming. They were told repeatedly by the prophets, our text is but one example. But they expected a king that would throw off the yoke of Roman tyranny. They certainly didn't expect a king who would humble himself in obedience all the way to the death of a cross. But that's the king who came to them, just as it had been foretold in the biblical prophecy.

People hear what they want to hear. The Jews of the first century are no different than the Christians of the twenty first century. People want a certain kind of leader. They look for what they want. They will even remake people in their own minds to be what they think they should be.

But for a brief moment – a wonderful moment – the people saw and welcomed just what God had promised. The Jews received their king. They spread their clothes on the road. They lay before their king branches of palm trees. It was a path prepared for a king to travel. And so he did. Just as the Bible said he would. Jerusalem welcomed her king.

He is just. He was a righteous king. No sin had ever entered his heart. He had spoken no false word. He had committed no unkind act. He did not cheat and steal to gain his kingdom. He did not make campaign promises he never intended to keep, or bold grandiose promises that were hollow and empty. Jesus came to claim what was his by divine right. Jerusalem was the city of peace, and the Prince of Peace had arrived. Jerusalem was the holy city, and the Holy One entered His city.

He is just and having salvation. He came with salvation to give. His justice and righteousness was a gift he would give to sinners in need. But Jesus did not come for his own sake. The good he did, he did not do for himself. He lived in perfect righteousness for the sake of the unrighteous. He came for sinners. He came for those who had failed to think, say, and do that righteousness which a righteous God demands of His creatures. He came to make the great exchange; his righteousness for their sin. He came to take the unrighteousness, the burden of sinfulness from all sinners, and in return, give unto them his righteousness. The Prince of Peace came to bring peace to those at war with God on account of their own sinfulness.

He did not come with pomp and circumstance. He came humble, mounted on a donkey. He did not come as a victorious warrior, with gleaming armor, a battered sword, riding on a white charger. He came humble, mounted on a donkey, and won the victory over sin and death when they stripped Him naked and nailed him to a cross.

Humble, mounted on a donkey.

Surely this was a moment to capture in time! Young and old, men and women, rich and poor; he came to them all and they all greeted him. Thousands honored him. Their praise filled the air. Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

That moment has been captured and relived again and again and again. The Church sings in preparation to receive Christ who comes in His body and blood. She sings: Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he, blessed is he, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Palm Sunday gave way to Good Friday. The king who was welcomed with palms was betrayed into the hands of the Romans. He was subjected to the savage cruelty of public crucifixion. His body was nailed to a cross. He suffered and died.

After singing, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” we go to the altar and kneel. We eat His body given up for us on the cross. We drink the blood He shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The salvation humble king purchased on cross, comes to deliver it to us, humble, and mounted on a donkey – hidden under forms of bread and wine.

Look at him! He is in the form of God because he is God. But He humbles himself, and takes on our form, flesh and blood of mankind, the form of a servant, becoming the servant of all. He submits in obedience to his own law. He submits in silence even when obedience requires Him to drink the cup of divine wrath against sinners. Your holy King meekly submits to injustice as he willingly bears the sin of the world.

This is what God promised in our text. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.

God shows himself to his chosen people. What does he show them? He shows them humility. He comes to them in a way that they can receive him. He does not come to judge them. He does not come to punish them. He comes to rescue them.

He receives their praise and he watches it disappear. But he doesn't become embittered. He cries for Jerusalem. He knows that the crowd's adulation will give way to the bloodthirsty cries of the mob. He is not deterred. He sets his face to the cross and he humbly, dutifully, goes where his Father leads him.

Think like Jesus. Have his mind in you. You do not need to right the wrongs done against you. You do not need to defend your status. Humble yourself. Commit your cause to him who judges justly. He will contend for you. You don't need to win your battles. You don't even need to fight them.

But we want to prevail and we want to prevail now. The idea of setting aside vindication and leaving it up to God is a galling prospect. No wonder the praise of the Palm Sunday crowd was so fleeting. The people want to be empowered. But what kind of a king was he? It appeared that he became the victim of a cruel fate as he was arrested, taken before the Roman authorities, beaten, mocked, and finally crucified. The adoring church became the angry mob. He was not what they were expecting.

God is not what our sinful desires want. Nor does our sinfulness like the idea that revenge is not our task, but that we are to forgive those who sin against us.

But God promised a lowly king riding on a donkey. He did not promise social or political or financial empowerment. He promised something much greater than that!

He is just and having salvation. That's what he promises. And he delivers what he promises in the only possible way he could. The passion and suffering of Christ were not just a divine afterthought as if God were saying that this would be a good way to illustrate his love. No, the promise of the prophets had always been for a humble and suffering king. Listen to how he was described by the prophet Isaiah:

Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His

stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (Is. 53:1-7)

Such beautiful humility! He willingly sets aside honor and glory in order to embrace shame and suffering. Why in the world would he do such a thing? What could have possessed him?

You did!

He did what needed doing to bring peace to you and me! He did this to bring forgiveness. To grant you new life he was wounded, bruised, and punished.

Our true identity comes in that King, humble, mounted on a donkey, who came to bear the burden of our sin and death.

Humble, mounted on a donkey He delivers the salvation He purchased – in the spoken word you hear.

Humble, mounted on a donkey He delivers salvation – a piece of bread hides His body that was pierced for you.

Humble, mounted on a donkey He delivers salvation – a sip of wine hides His blood, shed for you. Amen.