

Matthew 21:1-9

It was a lesson that a young, inexperienced seminary student would not soon forget. Sitting with other seminary students in a hard pew at Kramer Chapel in Fort Wayne, Indiana, about to receive our calls placing us into the holy ministry, the preacher, during his sermon, had the nerve to call us, in front of our families, a bunch of donkeys...asses...jackasses if you will. Not because of our character—he didn't really even know us. But because, as pastors in the church, we were called to carry Christ to His people.

I'm not exactly sure why Jesus told His disciples to go into the village and bring back to Him a donkey with her colt. I'm not sure why Jesus chose to ride on the donkey as He entered the city of Jerusalem. I'm also not sure why He selected me to be one of His pastors. I'm not sure why He chooses to come to you, His people, through the words from my mouth and the sacraments given by my hands.

But He did, and He does. As Zechariah had prophesied, Jesus, the King of Kings, came riding on a donkey. He did not walk, He rode—not a warhorse...not an animal equipped for battle—but a donkey, a beast of burden, a humble and often stubborn burro...an ass. And today also, Jesus does not just saunter into your life and heart—He rides in, on the hands and mouth of the man He has chosen to be His donkey for you.

Did Jesus select the most impressive donkey in the village to ride on? We're not told...it was just a donkey. And to be honest, donkeys are not all that impressive. There are horse shows, dog shows, cat shows—contests for judging the best of these animals...and they are impressive. I've never heard of a donkey show. Donkeys are just...there. They do their job and you never get too excited about it. On Palm Sunday the people were not screaming, "Wow! Look at that donkey!" It was just doing what it was asked to do—carrying Jesus to His people.

Donkeys need to stay humble, because it's never about them. It's always about what they carry—about the work they're asked to do. Even hardworking donkeys like the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John...Martin Luther, and other great pastors and teachers in the church were just donkeys. They're not impressive because of who they were but because they carried Christ. It's all about Jesus. He's the One riding the donkey. The donkey is not going to be mocked, beaten, and crucified. Jesus is. The donkey saves no one. Jesus does.

Do you suppose that donkey did a perfect job carrying Jesus into Jerusalem? It never made an offensive noise? It never stumbled, even once? Well, if it was the perfect donkey then it was far different from me. Your pastor is not a perfect donkey. But he is a forgiven donkey. And that is what your Lord wants me to carry to you—not the demand for perfection, either of yourself, or of the other members who sit in the pews with you, or of your family—but forgiveness. If I don't carry forgiveness then I'm not carrying Jesus. If I demand that you first change your ways before God will show compassion to you, then I'm carrying a false Christ and not the Christ who rode toward the cross for you, even when you were His enemy.

Now as Jesus' donkey, if I don't preach the Law to you then I am not fit to be His donkey. But it's not my law I carry to you, it's God's Law. Jesus preached repentance. "Repent!" He cried out to the people during His ministry. And so, to carry Christ is to bring to you

both His word of Law and His word of Forgiveness. When I condemn you for breaking God's Commandments, it's not my condemnation—it's God's. At the same time, when you reject the Word I bring to you, you're not rejecting me—I'm just the donkey—you're rejecting the Christ I carry to you. "He who rejects you, rejects Me," Jesus told His donkeys in St. Luke 10. And Jesus also said to His donkeys, "He who receives you receives Me."

Now this is a hard thing for us. We would rather deal only with Christ and not with His donkey. And there are those people who try to avoid the donkey. But they're not helping themselves by keeping the donkey away. For where the donkey goes, Jesus goes. Jesus chooses to ride, not walk. He rides on His donkey. I'll admit it would be a whole lot easier for the donkey if Jesus had chosen not to ride on him. But that's how God chooses to come to His people.

The most important thing about this Palm Sunday text is just that—Jesus does come to His people. He comes to you because you need Him. Whether you're here to welcome Him or not—and there were those on Palm Sunday who did not welcome Jesus, but He came anyway...He rode into Jerusalem and went to the cross for them anyway. And Jesus is here for you, whether you love Him or not, because He loves you.

He does not come here on a warhorse, but on a donkey. He is not here to do battle with you. He is here to forgive you—to bring you peace. He is here, in fact, to assure you that the battle between God and you is over. There is peace now. God is at peace with you. He forgives you for fighting against Him. He holds no grudge against you. All of you are forgiven. Because Jesus ended that battle. He rode into Jerusalem because He was heading to the cross to die. And there God punished Him for your sins. There God rejected Jesus for your iniquity. He took out His anger at you on His own Son.

And now, "it is finished." The battle is over. Jesus comes riding to you, not with bow and spear, but with bread and wine—with the words of pardon. There is not one sin of yours that He remembers. He pardons everything. He does not place chains around your neck—He places bread and wine into your mouth, because this is His body and blood for you. The same Christ who rode to His people in Jerusalem now rides to you with these holy things, to give you peace, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Friend, all is well between God and you. And here's the challenge for us—it's not how God acts toward us, it's how we act toward God. Jesus does not come to you to do battle with you, but you and I still battle against Him. He comes to us on His donkey, but we desire to run when we see Him coming. He comes to bless us with His gracious gifts, but we resist Him. He comes to us with bread and wine, water and word, and we're making excuses of why we're too busy for Him.

The good news is—He doesn't stop coming to you. He comes, not to punish you, but to show mercy. He is never too busy to come to you. There is nothing Jesus loves more than to ride into Augusta and gather His people from here, and from Defiance, and Marthasville, and Washington, and tell you these comforting words, "I went to the cross for you, friend. I forgive you all your sins. And I will never stop riding on My donkey into your life through My Word and Sacraments, because you are My dear baptized child, and these precious gifts that I bring to you are yours—forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours."

Now that's something to be excited about! The donkey may not excite you...and that's as it should be. He's just a donkey, after all. But the Christ he carries...now He is something. And so you, His people, "Rejoice, for your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey." Amen.