

Wait! Who Is This?

Palm Sunday

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We have journeyed together this Lent, exploring darkness to sight, from darkness to light, and the journey continues today. Today we celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

And we know what's coming; the contrast between the light and the darkness is palpable as we move into this week. Christ enters into Jerusalem in the light of welcoming words from the crowd, and he leaves in the darkness of another crowd, to the darkness of his death. This week is an important one in the life of the church and today we find ourselves in the midst of the wayward joy of the crowd. We find ourselves in their hope of the coming Messiah. We find ourselves pondering the question, who is this that rides into town.

Can we find ourselves in the crowd? We are surrounded by the thousands and thousands of people who have journeyed to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Estimates show that the city grew from a city with 50,000 people to a city with 500,000 people. Jerusalem is crowded, it is like a circus with everyone getting ready for Passover and rumors spread fast that Jesus is on his way into town. Do you come and bring your children? Or take a break from working hard to feed your family? You were busy at school but do you come? Or maybe You were busy looking for work, do you come too? Perhaps your darkness and baggage that occupies your every day makes it feel impossible to come and join the crowd, but do you try and come anyway. You are probably tired, excited, curious and maybe confused.

All of you, with all your busyness, come to where the bustle is taking place. And there you see what the fuss is about. It is indeed Jesus this man who you have heard about, but never seen. You heard that this man can turn water into wine, heals the blind and lame and raises people from the dead. This man who makes almost everyone he encounters ask the question. Who is this? A crazy person? Prophet? King? Messiah? Who is this?

The crowd is excited! They are shouting! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. And they are laying a red carpet of palm branches and garments before him as he

rides, a donkey into town. This Jesus is important and you get caught up in the shouting of the crowd, in the excitement in the wonder! There are no questions for this moment! Only joy! Jesus, the son of David is here, and like the prophet said, he is riding on a donkey.

For some in the crowd though, a little bit of sadness sweeps over them. They remember in their mind's eye Pilate's procession into Jerusalem just a few days ago--a militaristic, triumphal entry with war horses, chariot, and weapons. He did this in the days before Passover to remind Jewish pilgrims that Rome was in charge, which Pilate thought was especially relevant and important for Rome to do at Passover, a celebration of the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. So, Jesus' donkey ride, juxtaposed with Pilate's procession, would have served as a reminder to all those who were waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna that Rome was the new Egypt, and the Emperor the new Pharaoh.

The words, Hosanna, save us took on a deeper meaning as you remember the Passover, as you remember that God's people are still under oppression and live in fear. Hosanna! Save us. Save us from the powerful, save us Son of David, be our king!

Then there are even others in the crowd that spread doubt and contention. So now imagine yourself a Pharisee in Jerusalem. Even though you know what the prophets say about the coming Messiah, riding on a donkey, you just know that this Jesus guy couldn't be it. You wait until the excitement of Jesus on a donkey passes. The joy dies down and the shadows fall over Jerusalem. You sneer, you didn't respond in enthusiastic Hosannas with the multitude, those hooligans, the ignorant folk that traveled here. You stood and watched as they demonstrated such foolishness. Jesus, a king? He couldn't be, he talks and eats with sinners, any real king knows, that is not how you behave!

As you sneer in your annoyance with these people, you ask, to stir the pot, to spread doubt among those who were so convinced...So who is this rider? A prophet, says one. The son of David, another. The Messiah, answers another. As they look around at each other, with their different answers, all of a sudden no one seems certain. You smile. The unconvinced half snicker on your face and the cold glance of your eyes chill the glowing faith of those who were just rejoicing. They are confused, they look stupidly about, They ask why does Jerusalem not acknowledge her king? Christ is the Messiah! Right?

But they begin to think, that donkey...was so unwarlike... they begin to question maybe Jesus doesn't look like someone who is going to conquer the evil powers that be, maybe he isn't the one who is to save

us! The shadows fall, around the loud Hosanna's, the proclamation of Jesus as king. Doubt seeps in. Who is this? Who is this, they ask in turmoil. Now imagine yourself, as yourself today. In this crowd. What attitude do you bring? Do you wave a palm branch, lay your coat down for Jesus? Do you shout with joy or with question in your voice? Maybe you couldn't make your lips utter the words of praise to the coming Messiah. Maybe it is just too hard.

We have the privilege of living on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. We know what happens... But we still feel pain, we still need our savior to save us from our brokenness, from our lack of faith, from ourselves and the harm we do to others. Palm Sunday can be a reminder that our savior has come, triumphantly to save us!

As we journey further into this week with Jesus another crowd emerges. The one who yells, Crucify Him! The crowd that will say give us Barabbas! Crucify Jesus! The crowd that denies Jesus. And when asked, *Who is Jesus?* they respond with mocking. They say he is crazy. A threat. They say: We want him dead. We see the suffering the Christ. We remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, who describes the suffering servant,

*I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting (Isaiah 50)*

Jesus, The one who is mocked, the one who is treated like dirt. It is in this week we see the light that a crowd can bring to the world and we see the darkness that they can bring. Can that cause us to question what do we bring into this world, light or darkness? Do we praise God with our lips but not with our minds? Or with our minds but not with our lips? Are we stirring contempt among people? Light or Darkness? Christ, the one who brings light into the darkness beacons us out of our darkness, into the light, he beckons us out our shame, and brokenness out of our inability to live life to the fullest, and calls us into Spirit breathed, Christ centered living. He calls us into the light. He asks us, Who do you say that I am?

But that's complicated in a world that seems so against God, against what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ. So , do we really know the answer? Can we stand up and say, stand up and answer who this Jesus is? We are so distracted, being pulled in a million different ways, It is hard to live a life

that is faithful to what we have been called, hard to stay focused, hard to be present with those who you encounter, and hard to know what you believe in a world that pulls at you so. We are a people, prone to wander, prone to doubt, prone to disbelief. We often don't know or remember what we believe or who we have faith in.

When asked the question, *Who is this Jesus?* We need to pause and there is no better time than Holy week, to pause and ask ourselves, *Wait, Who is this Jesus?* Prophet? King? Friend? Light of the World. Prince of Peace. Healer. Messiah?

It is in our wayward joy on this Palm Sunday, in our knowledge of the darkness to come that we need to hear and remember this good news! Jesus, the one who rides peacefully, and with great triumph, without chariot without weapon, without threat. This Jesus is the savior of the world, the one who has come, in the name of the Lord to save God's people from their brokenness, fear, and oppression.

Even as we live in the sometimes deeply distracted and darkness of our lives. Even as we question, in turmoil, *Who is this*, we can cling to the sure knowledge, that it is Jesus, who has come to save God's people from, pain, sorrow, sickness, addiction, unemployment, busyness, contempt, all those things that rip us apart. So it is with this knowledge, of the Good News of Christ that we speak, shout, whisper or barely mutter the words of the Psalmist!

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

Amen.