

“Shouting Stones or Silent Disciple”

Luke 19:40, Palm Sunday, April 13, 2014

Donkeys are famous for being stubborn. They’re the kind of pack animals that don’t seem to get too much respect; probably because they don’t give much respect. Compare a young woman to a horse, by saying: “She’s quite a fine Philly!” and that young woman will probably feel complimented. Or compare a young man to a horse by saying: “He’s quite a stud!” and you’ll probably see him grinning from ear to ear.

Compare someone to a donkey however, with that little three-letter word, commonly used as the equivalent for those people who act like donkeys, and they probably won’t be too happy with your comparison. To be fair, if you ask most donkeys, they probably wouldn’t be very flattered either with the people who earn that comparison. The point being: donkeys don’t often get much respect.

But the Lord likes to use the shameful things of this world to confound the strong and mighty. And He’s given some great honor to donkeys that no cherished war horse ever received: (1) According to the Old Testament book of Numbers, the Lord once gave a donkey a chance to speak, and turn a sinner named Balaam from the error of his ways (chapter 22). (2) But in today’s Gospel lesson we can see that the highest honor given to any donkey at any time, is that donkey who serves as a means of transportation for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is proudly carrying the Son of God into city streets of Jerusalem!

Here we are now once again at the beginning of another Holy Week; “holy” not because of anything that you or I have done or could ever do to make it holy, but because the holy Son of God shed his innocent blood for us on Calvary’s cross that first Good Friday—and because he was raised again from the dead on the that first Easter Sunday—to reconcile us to our heavenly Father and to give us new life in the kingdom of God.

Today is Palm Sunday, and on that first Palm Sunday Jesus enters Jerusalem as a very deliberate act to show that he is the One who has come in fulfillment of Zechariah’s ancient prophecy found in our Old Testament lesson today.

**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he,
Humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey!”**

There is a great significance to be found in the fact that Jesus rode into Jerusalem, not on a white steed, but on a donkey. As the writer explains to us—what this means is that he was not coming to initiate a war, but “to speak peace to the nations!” His reign will be universal: “His rule will be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth!”

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is deemed to be so significant that it is written about in all four of the New Testament gospels. On that day Jesus was

hailed by the crowds who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Passover feast with shouts of “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” as they anticipated the coming of the kingdom of God.

At long last in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus, who for the past three years of his earthly ministry had mostly refused to be openly honored as the Messiah because there were so many misconceptions that people had about the coming Messiah, is now announcing himself to be the Promised King in the very center of the Holy Land! Jesus does this so that all the people present can take sides—either for him or against him!

Nevertheless Jesus does not choose to make this public announcement with a great display of outward power, the way some rulers of nations do today, when they have their soldiers marching down the streets of their capital city with all their armored tanks before and after them! No Jesus will choose to enter the Holy City as the Prince of Peace! (Isaiah 9:7)

The people are so excited by what they see happening that they even spread their cloaks and leafy branches on the road for Jesus to ride over like a red carpet; an action which called to mind for some present...that day when other crowds of Jewish people spread their cloaks on the ground when Jehu was anointed King of Israel (2 Kings 9:13). They cut palm branches and other leafy plants, as was the custom of Jews for other celebrations and festivals, and threw them in Jesus' path.

So shortly before all this takes place, the Bible teaches us that Jesus sends two of his disciples to go and fetch a colt. He informs them where they will find the colt tied and that if the owner should ask them why they are untying the colt, they must tell him: **“The Lord has need of it!”**

This took place in a little town just outside the city of Jerusalem called Bethphage; a place where Jesus may have passed through many times. Perhaps the owner of this donkey already knew Jesus to be **“the LORD”** and honored him to such an extent that he and his household would allow the colt to be taken to Jesus without any opposition whatsoever! Whether this donkey knew it or not he was being given a privileged position that day for sure!

Our Lord probably waited in Bethany, at the southeastern base of the Mount of Olives, until the two disciples brought him the colt. From there Jesus now rides forward on the colt along the road leading into Jerusalem across the Mount of Olives.

THE HIGH DEGREE OF TENSION IN GLORIOUS EXPECTATION AS WELL AS THE HIGH DEGREE OF TENSION IN SHOCK OF EVERYTHING THAT WAS TAKING PLACE THERE THAT DAY; NONE OF WHICH HAD THE PRIOR APPROVAL OF ANY OF THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN JESUS' DAY, IT SEEMS, IS CONSTANTLY GROWING GREATER AND GREATER, HOUR BY HOUR AND MINUTE BY MINUTE!

Even his followers expect that he will not reveal himself very shortly in full power and glory as the Messiah-King. They honor him so highly that they even take off among their most valued possessions, their cloaks, their outer garments and throw them on the street before him!

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13)

Apart from the great multitude of disciples now accompanying Jesus, there are naturally also many other Jews; many of them being the Pharisees! The Pharisees are exceedingly annoyed at the Messianic praises which are now being bestowed on this Nazarene AGAINST WHOM MOST OF THEM HAVE LONG AGO, TAKEN SIDES!

These religious authorities are afraid that the public applause given to our Savior will cause the trigger-happy Pontius Pilate to take action against the people by force of arms. However, they do not venture to try and impose silence on the exultant multitude itself. The only alternative is, therefore, that they must ask Jesus to silence his disciples; who were most definitely playing a very prominent part in the applause and reverence being given to Jesus on that day!

Friends certainly not all of the Pharisees were hostile to Jesus during the course of his earthly ministry. St Luke tells us of several kinds of good deeds that were done by the Pharisee for Jesus, such as inviting him to dinner at their homes and warning him that he might be threatening his own personal security if he continued to carry out his plan to march openly into the city of Jerusalem (Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:1; 13:31-33).

But there is another warning that they gave to Jesus on that first Palm Sunday that is only relayed to us also by St. Luke in his gospel. The warning they give Jesus is only found in Luke 19:38: **“Teacher, order your disciples to stop!”**

This is when Jesus replies, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:40). In rabbinic writings there was a belief stated that the very stones could cry out at times against those who do evil. In this context, Jesus is professing his belief that the very stones would cry out against the religious authorities on that day, if the disciples were commanded to become silent! (Marshall, 716)

Stating his belief that the very stones would cry out in praise of him if his disciples chose to remain silent is Jesus' way of affirming once again that everything he is doing is in complete agreement with the Father's will for his life and mission.

Some wise person once said that courage is not the absence of fear, but a willingness to go ahead to do what needs to be done in spite of your fear!

Jesus' courage and determination to do his Heavenly Father's will completely, and in perfect obedience to God's design, even when mere mortals violently object, will soon be sharply contrasted with the cowardice of his disciples that will become fully evident when they desert him in the following days of that first Holy Week.

Luke 19:37 tells us that the crowds were "praising God for all the deeds of power that they had seen." They were probably talking about all the miraculous healings and feedings and exorcisms that so many of them had personally witnessed Jesus to perform.

But in their minds they certainly had not signed on with Jesus for the slashing of a whip across his back or the pounding of nails into his hand and feet. **Deeds of power didn't equate in their minds with a spirit of servant-hood and humility that would lead to a cross.**

It is much easier to pop in for Palm Sunday and then pop out for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday before popping back in for the trumpets, the lilies, the new clothes and the candy on Easter Sunday. But just as in every year of our annual commemoration of our Lord's suffering, passion and glorious resurrection; somebody needs to stand by Jesus again this year through the thick and the thin of this whole ordeal.

Somebody needs to hang in there with him.

Somebody needs to stay at his side as he is humiliated, beaten, mocked, and killed.

Holy Week is our annual opportunity to choose courage over cowardice, to choose to be a shouting stone rather than a silent disciple.

If we don't have the courage to stand by Jesus, who will? And this is not only to be true for us one week out of the year, but a challenge God sets before us all throughout our lives. It is a very important promise that you are making to God's today—Christopher, Noah, and Bailey! You are stating your intention, by the grace of God, to always be a shouting stone rather than a silent disciples!

I don't know. Maybe we can find someone who will do so in our place.

But now to everyone present, let me say it again, if we choose to be a silent disciple this year, lackadaisical in our devotion and lukewarm in our compassion, who will continue to praise Jesus to the skies? I don't know. Maybe we can find a stone, some brave person, who will shout hosannas to the King while every other voice mocks his name and he hangs, almost completely deserted, on a hill. Amen