

Palm Sunday  
CC - 29 March 2015

We have journeyed through Lent, and find ourselves at Holy Week. Today we remember Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem, and join the joyous crowd.. We celebrate his life....his ministry....his message of love and kindness and inclusion.

Yet, there are some details that are sometimes missing in descriptions of the parade and celebratory atmosphere.

Debie Thomas has a very helpful take on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, as do Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book. [The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Last Days in Jerusalem](#),

According to New Testament scholars Borg and Crossan, the Triumphal Entry was not a spontaneous event. Jesus was not the passive recipient of impromptu adoration. Though worship might have happened, it was not the point.

Rather, as Mark tells it, Jesus' parade\_by\_donkey was staged. It was an act of political theater, an anti\_imperial demonstration designed to mock the obscene pomp and circumstance of Rome.

Borg and Crossan argue that two processions entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday; Jesus' was not the only Triumphal Entry.

Every year, the Roman governor of Judea would ride up to Jerusalem from his coastal residence in the west. Why? To be present in the city for Passover — the Jewish festival that swelled Jerusalem's population from its usual 50,000 to at least 200,000.

The governor would come in all of his imperial majesty to remind the Jewish pilgrims that Rome was in charge. They could commemorate an ancient victory against Egypt if they wanted to. But real, present\_day

resistance (if anyone was daring to consider it) was futile.

Here is Borg and Crossan's description of Pontius Pilate's imperial procession: "A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."

It's important to remember that according to Roman imperial belief, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome; he was the Son of God. For the empire's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession signaled more than a military threat. It was the embodiment of a rival theology. Heresy on horseback.

This is the background, Borg and Crossan argue, against which we need to frame the Triumphal Entry of Jesus. That Jesus planned a counter\_procession is clear from Mark's account of the event. Jesus knew he was going to enter the city on the back of a donkey; he had already made arrangements to procure one.

As Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, looking (by contrast) ragtag and absurd. His was the procession of the ridiculous, the powerless, the explicitly vulnerable. As Borg and Crossan remark, "What we often call the triumphal entry was actually an anti\_imperial, anti\_triumphal one, a deliberate [mocking] of the conquering emperor entering a city on horseback through gates opened in abject submission."

Elsewhere, Crossan notes that Jesus rode "the most unthreatening, most un\_military mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her

little colt trotting along beside her."

In fact, Jesus was drawing on the rich, prophetic symbolism of the Jewish Scriptures in his choice of mount. The prophet Zechariah predicted the ride of a king "on a colt, the foal of a donkey." [the animal that princes would ride when they wanted to signify peaceful intentions. - Margaret Farley] Jesus would be the nonviolent king who'd "command peace to the nations."

[Did the crowds realize these things - Do we?] Debie Thomas suspects they did not. After all, they were not interested in theater; they were ripe for revolution. They wanted — and expected — something world\_altering. An ending\_to\_the\_story worthy of their worship, their fervor, their dusty cloaks\_on\_the\_road.

What they got instead was a parade of misfits. A comic donkey\_ride....

[Because the real message of] Jesus [is about living fully in] God's kingdom - a kingdom of peace, a kingdom of justice, a kingdom of radical and universal freedom. A kingdom dramatically unlike the oppressive empire Jesus challenged on Palm Sunday[, or the one we sometimes see now.]

After many years, the people had grown tired and frustrated by the oppressive Roman leaders. They desperately wanted a Messiah, a King of Kings who would rescue them from all this.

And what they got - what we got was a King of Kindness, who preached love and forgiveness and community. I don't believe we would be sitting here today if he had just been another conqueror. There have been many such forceful rulers over the years.

The message Jesus preached continually reminds us about God's character.... like the father who welcomes home his prodigal son.... no matter what. We want to be accepted and loved in spite of our many mistakes....like the woman at the well.

Because of Jesus, we remember God's abundance, and trust that we will be cared for when we connect as beloved community, like those who were fed by a small basket of fish and a few pieces of bread.

We too need healing in our lives, for our bodies, our worried minds, and our spirits, like so many who experienced Jesus healing touch....the blind man who saw, the girl who was cleansed of evil spirits, the woman who had bled for years who was cured.

Our lives are blessed and also challenged. Many of our fears are reflected in the news and in the eyes and hearts of our neighbors. We wonder what the future holds for us and our descendants. We know many are struggling and we would like to help, but the need seems so great. We long for all to know the full inclusion of God's love and acceptance. Charles Campbell describes it this way -

“Riding on a colt, his feet possibly dragging on the ground, Jesus comes not as one who lords his authority over others, but as one who humbly rejects domination. He comes not with pomp and wealth, but as one identified with the poor. He comes not as a mighty warrior, but as one who is vulnerable and refuses to rely on violence. Jesus [is offering] a totally different understanding of “rule” and invites people to see and live in the world in a new way.”

He comes as the answer to prayer.

Today on this Palm Sunday, we enter this story and celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Listen to “And there were ordinary people, too” - Maren Tirabassi

(Luke 19:28\_40)

My granddaughter Hannah  
picked up a palm branch.  
She ran over and gave it to me.  
Here it is – dry and brittle already  
just like yesterday's parade.

We live on the pilgrim road  
at the Bethany end,  
and we can see all the way  
into Jerusalem.  
Crusty bachelor lives next door –  
Daniel bar Joseph,  
and his precious donkey.  
Old man chases all the kids  
away from Popo.

Jesus' followers arrived at the gate  
untied and borrowed Popo –  
I waited for Daniel to yell  
from here to the Temple Mount,  
but he just asked politely  
when his girl would come home.

Then everyone threw down their coats  
and leafy branches,  
trying to make a hard road soft.  
and singing like some crazy people –  
“Hosanna, Hosanna!!”

Hannah, Samuel, Mary,  
Rachel and little Levi were loudest,  
running in and out of the road  
waving branches and tripping people.

Some people call them obnoxious,  
but I just say –  
let them be lively.  
In a country full of soldiers,  
children learn soon enough  
to be afraid.

The same some people  
who like to think they're important  
suggested that the children  
(you understand  
that would be my grandkids)  
just shut up.

Jesus looked over at them –  
looked them over, too,

said, “If these children were quiet,  
the stones on the ground  
would start to sing some rocky song.”

I think I'll keep the palm branch  
and remember him.

Today, we remember this parade that was meant to signal a new order, one  
where all would know God's abundance and prosperity.

Today we are grateful for this King of Kindness and Acceptance and Love.  
Today we celebrate with gratitude, the life of our Lord of Hopefulness.... of  
Gentleness, of Kindness.... and our hearts are filled and our strength is renewed.