

**Come Next Sunday: Yeah Right!**  
**By Reverend Litton Logan**  
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**Scriptures:**

<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11:1-11 (NRSVA)

**Sermon:**

Traditionally, scholars have seen two major literary themes or devices at work in the Gospel of Mark. One is the hidden-ness of Jesus' true nature as the Messiah of Israel, the so-called Messianic Secret; and the second theme is the hidden-ness of the true nature of the kingdom of God. These themes or literary devices are traditionally understood to have been used by the author to highlight and critique the Palestinian Jewish establishment, Jesus' family, and his disciples not understanding who and what Jesus was. These folks are contrasted with Mark's audiences, including us, who say we know who Jesus was and what the nature of the kingdom really is - yeah, right!

However, there is another perspective on Mark, a sociological perspective, which I find a more compelling reason for Mark being so vague and obtuse. In this perspective, Mark's Gospel is still written in Rome, but it is not sandwiched in Nero's persecution of Christians in 64 C.E. and the Jewish rebellion of 66-70 C.E. as traditionalists believe. I think Mark's Gospel was written shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E., and therefore the rebellion and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple play a large but silent role as the background for the author's gospel.

In between Nero's persecution and the suppressing of the Jewish rebellion, followers of Jesus in Rome would have been under scrutiny and suspicion, especially since we know that many Jews in the Diaspora sent aid to the rebels. In my opinion and others, the author wants to make sure that his audiences understand that Jesus and his understandings of the Jewish kingdom of God were in no way associated with the Jewish rebellion and his followers in Rome are good citizens and no threat.

The author makes the case that although Jesus may have been arrested, charged, and crucified for sedition, everyone misunderstood who he really was, except the demons and one lone Roman soldier at the foot of his cross. Furthermore, the Jewish kingdom of God that was expected to come soon was not a military-political thing involving human insurrections. The kingdom to come, which will be marked by the return of the risen Lord for sure, will totally be an otherworldly thing, on an otherworldly schedule, and well beyond any human designs or machinations.

The author of Mark does not give Jesus a long, prominent Jewish pedigree, especially not a Davidic pedigree, as does Matthew and Luke, who write much later from other places in the Roman Empire well away from Rome. The author, in his opening words, simply proclaims Jesus' honor standing and authority as a Son of God. In his culture, a son is understood to have the qualities of the father and expected to represent the father in and through those qualities. Therefore, in Mark, the truly human Jesus is divinely anointed to represent God and to perform many wonders such as healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding large crowds with meager fare, forgiving sins, and restoring honor status to individuals and families. Jesus does not use his power against Rome, or against the Jewish establishment per se, he only use it to help his people.

In addition, in Mark, Jesus never claims any titles for himself. Even when the Pharisees challenge Jesus, he lets his works and messages speak for themselves. Jesus refused to confirm demonic insights or pronouncements, or to validate traditional expectations of himself as the Messiah. Given that in Jesus' world public perceptions of who and what a person was also formed one's own self-perceptions, Jesus, as his ministry progressed, had to ask his disciples who do people say I am; who do you say I am. Jesus will not even affirm Peter's understanding of himself as the Messiah and sternly commands his disciples to keep quiet about such things. Jesus definitely does not confirm Pilate's question about him being the King of the Jews. In Mark, Jesus sees himself as truly human, a son of man, who as our text today points out, is anointed to come in the name of the Lord.

Our scene today of Jesus entering Jerusalem is very confusing, almost schizophrenic. I say this because we see Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey as the personification of the kingly expectations found Zechariah 9:9-10. In these Hebrew texts, this king, who was actually understood by the rabbis to be God, is the one coming to "save or rescue the people" and bring peace to God's elect and all nations.

I point out that in the ancient Middle Eastern world, leaders rode horses if they went into battle, but donkeys if they came in peace. First Kings 1:33 mentions Solomon riding a donkey on the day he was recognized as the new king of Israel. Therefore, the mention of a donkey in Zechariah 9:9-10 fits the description of a king who would be righteous but peaceful and gentle. Zechariah 9:10 says: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." (There are other instances of leaders riding donkeys and are found in the book of Judges 5:10; 10:4; 12:14; and 2 Samuel 16:2.)

Thus, the confusion in our scene today. Yes, Jesus enters Jerusalem as a king, a king of peace, while a small crowd of hopefuls, disciples, and well-wishers gathered along the way shouting Hosanna - save us, rescue us - to one they hope is a Davidic king. The general expectation was that when the kingdom of David was reestablished on earth it would be at the hands of a warrior-king-priest-messiah, not a man of peace.

The people's hope in a Davidic king means they want Jesus to free them not only from Roman occupation but also from the oppression of the Jewish elite, while ushering in mythical days of glory and justice under a king like David - a man after God's heart (1 Sam. 13:14). I

guess in our scenario today we can imagine that the Messiah could enter the city disguised as a man of peace and at the right moment run into a telephone booth, discard his glasses, whip off his humble, human nature and break forth in power and majesty to "save the day."

If you were a Jesus-believer living in Rome after Nero's persecutions and the Jewish rebellion, you would have wanted to be proactive about defining your beliefs and faith by highlighting the Zachariah picture, not the Davidic perspective. In fact, you may need to make a good case in defense of your veneration of a crucified, Palestinian Jew, minus any overtones of militancy or sedition; especially, as I said, since it was rumored that Jews in Rome may have sent support to the rebels in Jerusalem. I think Mark does a great job in redirecting people's focus and suspicions and making his case for Jesus as the Christ of God, who comes in peace not in militant human expectations. Therefore, let me just say that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was just one more instance where he was misunderstood and misrepresented.

Speaking of Jesus coming and people missing the point, it seems that one Palm Sunday due to a sore throat, 5-year-old Sammy stayed home from church with a babysitter. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm fronds. Sammy asked what they were for. "People waved them, held them over Jesus' head as he walked by or laid them on the ground for his donkey to walk on," his father responded.

As tears welled up in his little eyes, Sammy exclaimed, "Wouldn't you just know it, the one Sunday I don't go, and he shows up and with a real, live donkey."

Jesus silenced the demons (1:25, 34, 3:12), who recognized him as the Holy One of God but misunderstood his mission, which they initially thought was to destroy them. Jesus did come to destroy the demonic but not in the way the demons anticipated. Jesus tried to limit the publicity and sensationalism surrounding his mighty deeds and wonders to head off misunderstandings of him and his mission. Jesus taught in parables to veil his authority, while speaking a little more openly to his disciples, who obviously did not get it.

Jesus told the people that the kingdom of God, which has come near them, is not like anything they expect. The kingdom of God is like sewing new cloth on an old garment. It is like weeds and seeds; that is, seeds scattered that must struggle to grow or not, or like the seed of the ubiquitous weed, the mustard plant, which eventually grows and takes over a field, while giving structure in which birds build their nest.

Jesus, as a humble man of peace, riding on a donkey colt was about to come into his own as a king, but not in the way the demons, the disciples, the crowds, the elite, Pilate, and many of us think or hope.

I want to point out that we are made to understand that this colt has never been ridden, it is unbroken, yet seems to submit to the weight of Jesus without protest or bucking. Throughout Mark's Gospel we see Jesus as the Lord of nature, stilling storms, walking on water, and now riding an unbroken colt with no resistance. Thus, Jesus, as a Son of God is Lord of humankind and nature; and he was about to deliver an unexpected triumphant victory from out of what initially appears to be a defeat.

I have watched the TV shows, movies, and listened to certain Christian perspectives made popular by the Tel-evangelist and their triumphant images and expectations of a militant Jesus' returning to usher in the fullness of the kingdom of God. However, a closer look at Mark's Gospel, our first gospel by the way and we may see that Jesus on every turn disavows triumphalism as we humans understand such things. Thus, the blatant contrast between Jesus as the king, riding on a donkey, who comes in peace, versus the crowd's expectation of a Davidic, warrior-king.

So, one more time we see Jesus being hailed as something he wasn't. Today we see again that the people don't understand, don't have a clue, about how God really works in the human condition, or what the kingdom is really all about. I can only imagine Jesus' disappointment that

people just didn't seem to get it. Even these many centuries later we still want to overlay militant and regal power models and our sense of vengeance as justice onto him.

Listen, I will be the first to tell you that I want to see Jesus come back in power and majesty and round up all the evil people and do something horrible to them and vindicate my sense of justice. I want to see the heavens burst apart, clouds roll back, lightening jumping from cloud to cloud, thunder pealing, and divine light streaming down, spotlighting Jesus descending on a platform of clouds with fire and judgment in his eyes for the wicked. I want to see the spectacular event, when the dead are raised, and Hitler, Mussolini, Genghis Khan, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Kim Jong Un, Pol Pot, and others are resurrected and watch them writhe in pain as they get what's coming to them in the fires of hell.

I delight in imagining all the goodies I am going to get in the kingdom - endless days with my wife fishing new trout streams with primo fly rods; three-pound trout on every other cast, who compliment me on how well I did after they are caught just before I release them. I long for those church potlucks with zero calories, and angels by the droves falling all over themselves to please me and to take care of me like a king. Wow! Sounds, great, huh? (*However, my wife's idea of kingdom life may not parallel mine.*)

Be that as I imagine, in Mark chapter 13, Jesus speaks of the end of time when the Son of Man, a super being, gathers God's elect from the four corners of the earth and heaven to give them dominion over the world. (The rabbis saw the Son of Man as symbolic of the people of Israel in the book of Daniel, 7:13) Whether Jesus understood himself as this Son of Man or whether his followers later came to understand him this way is still being debated in the halls of academia. In summary, let us simply see Jesus this morning entering Jerusalem from the east on a donkey in parody of Pontius Pilate, the military governor of Judea, entering from the west as he comes up from his headquarters in Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean in anticipation of civil unrest that was often associated with the Jewish Passover.

Also, let us not forget that today, as Jesus enters Jerusalem, he will probably be disappointed in some of our lack of insight into the events of the coming week because some will be blinded by selfish hopes in triumphalism. Please, let us not forget that Jesus, like us, struggled with obedient love in those dark and agonizing moments in the Garden of Gethsemane that we will hear about on Maundy Thursday evening. Let us remember that Jesus will doubt his own insights and expectations as he hangs between life and death on Calvary, feeling betrayed just as we often doubt and feel betrayed in moments of despair, disappointment, fear, uncertainty, and suffering.

However, come next Sunday morning no longer will people be able claim that the true nature of Jesus is hidden to the spiritually discerning; no longer will the nature of the kingdom of God be confusing to the seekers of peace. Yeah, right! We can only hope. Come next Sunday, no longer must Jesus-people be guarded and defend themselves and their intentions before the world. The world will know that Christians are not insurrectionist but resurrectionist, and we invite all the peoples of the world to join us in peace, wholeness, and the divine blessings of the living Christ not only in this life but in the one yet to be. We can only hope. Come next Sunday out of the muddle of history and human expectations about who and what Jesus was and is and what the kingdom of God is like all will be made clear. We can only hope!

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