

John 12:12-16

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion, see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

"The Burden of Title"

Between Parades

Ann Weems

We're good at planning!
Give us a task force and a project and we're off and running!
No trouble at all!
Going to the village and finding the colt,
even negotiating with the owners is right down our alley.
And how we love a parade!
In a frenzy of celebration we gladly focus on Jesus
and generously throw out coats and palms in his path.
And we can shout praise loudly enough
to make the Pharisees complain.
It's all so good!
It's between parades that we don't do so well.
From Sunday to Sunday we forget our hosannas.
Between parades the stones will have to shout because we don't.

From Sunday to Sunday we forget our hosannas. Hosanna means save us. In his reflection on that forgetful palm waving crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem years ago, Shusake Endo wrote: *The Pesach (Passover) was at hand. The people preparing for the festival were looking back on their long history, rueful over the anguished adversity of their ancient wandering migration, and they prayed with fervor that God would come again to restore prosperity to his land now trampled underfoot by the Gentiles. Jesus, of course, knew the spirit of the feast. On this particular day, shortly before the festival itself began, with full knowledge he dared to plunge into that whirlpool of popular misunderstanding. Descending from the Mount of Olives and through the cheers from the crowd, he certainly knew that he was soon going to disappoint these people, and that the people in their frustration would then turn against him . . . Jesus, coming down the mountain and entering the city, wore a painful smile* (Imaging the Word, p. 180)

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel! No wonder those people of faith with a long history of God saving them---misunderstood. In Israel's memory, the title of King of Israel held the expectation that the Almighty was active among them again--- anointing a human being with the God Power to bring them a military victory and to restore them to national glory. Their misunderstanding was like the certainty that a woman displayed in the religious joke when: A grandmother was told by her grandson that in Sunday school the teacher said Jesus was Jewish. The Presbyterian grandmother said, "Well, that may be, but I assure you, God is still a Presbyterian (Ency. Of Humor, p. 30). Jesus wore a painful smile knowing that everyone would become fearful, disappointed and frustrated in their misunderstanding of his interpretation of the way in which God was saving them through his death on a cross rather than by the might of the sword.

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

In the early church's account of the good news, all the gospel writers included Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in an attempt to clear up the misunderstanding. Each used symbols and scripture to differentiate the military, glory, and power expectations associated with the king of Israel and . . . Jesus---The Anointed One who saves in the name of the Lord by way of the cross. In his account of the triumphal entry, John used palms, the colt, and scripture from the prophet Zechariah to tease out the misunderstanding.

The palm. A palm is a tall, slender tree whose leaves fan out at the top like a plume. The date is its much-consumed fruit. The palm is especially hardy in arid environments since it has deep tap roots that effectively seek out the water table. This enables it to live a long life, bearing fruit for many years. . . Many parts of the tree were used. The fruit was consumed as a sweet. A fermented drink was made from the sap. The leaves were used as roofing for houses and for weaving mats and baskets. According to tradition, the leaves were also gathered and displayed as a symbol of joy and celebration at the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem. As a metaphor, the palm tree yields much for our understanding of the nature of the Divine. . . Giver of abundant, long, sweet, and joyful life. It became associated with kings of Israel when Solomon displayed decorative palms in the Temple that he built for worship of Yahweh. It's upright and stately form suggested justice and nobility (from the Biblical Dictionary, p. 746).

The colt. Jesus chose to ride a colt, instead of a horse into Jerusalem. *Instead of a military steed, he chose an agricultural tool, not a weapon of war; a tractor, not a tank.* Theologian Samuel Wells interpreted Jesus' choice of colt in this way: *He changed the notion of*

leadership and kingship by riding on a colt rather than a horse. Others had paraded and would continue to parade on a fine stallion. They would take on the authorities of their day by force of arms and die, gloriously or ingloriously, to be remembered as heroes and patriots (Christian Century, April 5, 2000). Not Jesus. Rather than fighting or fleeing from the powers that harmed God's people in the city, Jesus confronted evil with nonviolent direct action. The colt symbolized the victorious third way of Almighty Love.

Prophetic scripture. The gospel writers looked back into Hebrew scripture to interpret God's new covenant of salvation in Jesus. In his Palm Sunday account, John included verse 9 from the ninth chapter of Zechariah. In 9:9-10, the prophet announced that the Lord would restore the Temple with proper worship of God, stop war, and usher in a reign of justice and peace. "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of donkey. 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.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Blessed be everyone who comes in the name of the Lord . . . in the peace of Christ. In the New Zealand Prayer Book there is a prayer that disciples of Jesus pray corporately on Palm Sunday. In hopes of understanding faith's meaning in the scripture, palms, and colt in the Jesus parade into Jerusalem they pray even as we do on this day: *Jesus, when you rode into Jerusalem the people waved palms with shouts of acclamation. Grant that when the shouting dies we may still walk beside you even to a cross. Amen.*