

Today's scripture is the gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem for the first time. In Jesus' day, Jerusalem was the heart of Jewish worship and the seat of Roman authority. In Mark's version of the account he has Jesus coming down the *Mount of Olives*--- *the place from which according to Zechariah 14 God will fight the nations and restore Jerusalem*--- *the place from which the Sicarious leader Menahem and the great military leader Simon Maccabeus entered before Jesus in the second century B.C.*

(*Christian Century*, April 5, 2000 p. 387) In his portrayal of the event, Mark set the stage for battle. More specifically, it was a battle against what the New Testament refers to as battle against the "principalities and powers." In his scholarly study on principalities and powers Walter Wink proposes that the Christian view of them was that:

The powers are good.

The powers are fallen.

The powers must be redeemed.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a defining moment for the way in which God in Jesus frames the battle for the redemption of these powers.

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 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. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders in the street said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 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.

“Colt Attack”

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Mark 11:7

“Save us now!” the crowds shouted to Jesus as he descended from the Mount of Olives with his face set on Jerusalem. “Restore for us, the glorious kingdom of David!” “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

It was a great day for a parade for people who needed saving in and around Jerusalem. The good powers of the leadership and institutions had fallen. The propensity to dominate or ‘lord’ over others prevailed. Acts of violence to one another kept people in fearful bondage. A thick cloud of evil choked God’s spirit for freedom to love. In *Engaging the Powers* (p. 7), Wink wrote: *There were in the first century both Jews and Christians who perceived in the Roman empire a demonic spirituality that they called Sammael or satan. But they encountered this spirit in the actual institutional forms of Roman life: legions, governors, crucifixions, payment of tribute, Roman sacred emblems and standards and so forth. They also saw evil forces taking hold of religious and organized social bodies.*

For example (a humorously made up one), in Jerusalem which was the heart of Jewish worship this sign hung on the temple door--- peacemaking meeting scheduled for

today has been canceled due to conflict. (World's Greatest Collection of Church Jokes, 79). Or, a humorous example about bad things

happening to good people under Roman is like the story about the (Deductions WGCCJ p. 94) *little boy who wanted one hundred dollars very much and prayed for it for two weeks, but nothing happened. Then he decided to write a letter to God requesting the one hundred dollars. When the post office received the letter addressed to "God, USA," they didn't know what to do with it, so sent it to the president at the White House. The president was so impressed he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a five dollar bill. "That should look like a large sum of money to one so young." The boy was delighted with the five dollars and immediately sat down to write a thank-you. Thank you for sending me the money, he wrote, however, I noticed that for some reason you had it sent through Washington D.C. and as usual, the government deducted ninety-five percent.*"

According to Mark, Jesus entered the stronghold of fallen powers in the city of Jerusalem one time and one time only. This is important because it framed his entry as a defining moment for God's way of initiating the battle to redeem the fallen powers operative there. Mark clued us in on this moment as a defining one through Jesus' comment to his disciples: "You will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden." God was doing a new thing. A second thing that stuck out for me was that 2/3 of the story of the church's triumphant account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was about the colt (donkey or ass). I know this because I

counted the words. One hundred forty six out of the two hundred twenty two words in the account were about the colt. So that, by the time I was done counting, it was clear to me that Jesus was waging a “Colt Attack” against the fallen powers. That *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).

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and they threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.

Jesus’ choice of a colt was a defining moment for the way in which Jesus revealed God’s battle to redeem the fallen powers that had succumbed to a deadly pattern of redemptive violence. In another part of his study on the powers (p. 175) Wink said it in this way: *Human evolution has provided the species with two deeply instinctual responses to violence: flight or fight. Jesus offers a third way: nonviolent direct action.* The colt symbolized this non-violent third way of Jesus.

The colt symbolized this third way of non-violence in

which Jesus confronted the fallen powers in the institutions and systems that practiced redemptive violence in the *family, the Law, the sacrificial system, the Temple, kosher food regulations, the distinction between clean and unclean, patriarchy, role expectations for women and children, the class system, the use of violence, racial and ethnic divisions, the distinction between insider and outsider---in short, every prop of domination, division, and supremacy* (p. 110).

Jesus led a colt attack. It was critical for God's revelation of the third way of non-violence that he did so. But lest we miss the full meaning of the story, it is important for us that we back track into the part of the palm Sunday story which tells about the acquisition of the donkey. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

Mark 11: 1-3

The way I read this is that Jesus needs every person to help him redeem the fallen spiritual powers through a personal commitment to participate in and practice his third way of

non-violent direct action against the fallen powers. He was needful of their participation then, just as Christ is needful of ours now.

This week, many of you in your own way and I have in mine as an ordained clergy, actively participated in Jesus' third way. Many of us denounced the anti-gay postcard that was mailed to West Bridgewater residents prior to Saturday's election. Because I am an authorized leader in the UCC, I was invited by the press to issue a statement on the mailing. Because I saw it as an opportunity to do non-violent battle against the spiritual power of hate's opposition to the Lord's equal loving for all of humanity, I framed my statement in this way.

The anti-gay postcard distributed by the Traditional Value Coalition was an act of hate. It horrified me that fellow human beings could act in such an inhumane manner. It disturbed me that a single agenda group was trying to link their agenda of hate to the political well being of the Town of West Bridgewater. It angered me that a non-religious coalition was attempting to link their mission of hate with the work of Jesus Christ by using the "Reverend" Louis Sheldon as a stamp of endorsement for their agenda. As an ordained clergy in the United Church of Christ, I am authorized to say that the coalition's agenda is not endorsed by the United Church of Christ or the Unitarian Universalist Association. We denounce the coalition's anti-gay views and hate agenda of the postcard mailing.

This morning we will be receiving three people into membership of The First Church of West Bridgewater. We give thanks, that you have chosen to number yourself as a disciple of Jesus' third way Love --- of doing non-violent battle against the principalities and powers that seek to do violence within and among you. Just as the crowd celebrated and blessed Jesus for his colt attack in the name of the Lord we bless you in your service to the Lord.

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