



Meditation— Matthew 21.¹⁻¹¹

¹And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, ²Saying unto them, "Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. ³And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, 'The Lord hath need of them;,' and straightway he will send them."

⁴All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵"Tell ye the daughter of Sion,
Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,
meek, and sitting upon an ass,
and a colt the foal of an ass."

⁶And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, ⁷And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. ⁸And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. ⁹And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying,

"Hosanna to the Son of David:
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest."

¹⁰And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?"

¹¹And the multitude said, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus was under necessity of constantly correcting the world's twisted view of what greatness and power looked like—a view to which his own disciples seem to have held and to which they expected Jesus to conform. Over and over again, Jesus found it necessary to repeat by word and action that rather than being accepted and raised to a position of power, he would be rejected and killed. Scandalously, he maintained that his death would, in fact, be a sign and evidence, not of his failure and weakness, but of his greatness and power.

Such assertions always left his disciples feeling embarrassed and confused. Who can blame them? Whoever heard of the sort of greatness and power that Jesus advocated and practiced in his own life? Jesus would keep at it right through his final breaths. Leading up to his scandalous death on the cross, he used his "Triumphal Entry" on Palm Sunday as another sermon on the nature of true greatness and power.

It seems almost certain that Jesus intended his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem to stand in clear contrast to the common Roman triumphs that celebrated the accomplishments and grandeur of Emperors and Generals. Now, the Romans knew how to throw a triumph. Emperors and generals entered the city in huge processions and with great pomp and fanfare, evidence of their popularity. Mounted on muscular and prancing stallions and driving defeated and subject peoples before them, they sought to project power and control and intimidating dominance. Using public funds, no expense was spared to conduct lavish

processions, games, and feasting. These could go on for many days. These, too, spoke of the honoree's powerful and commanding societal dominance.

Yes, Rome's leaders appreciated the power of propaganda that a triumphal entry provided. They knew how to preach their own version of sermons about the nature of power and greatness. So, the sermon Jesus preached on the day of his Triumphal Entry through his very intentional selection of a donkey as his means of conveyance into Jerusalem could not be more at odds with Roman traditions of triumphs and the propaganda they disseminated about greatness and power.

Jesus intended to be a king and leader like no other. He had no interest in seeming dominant and intimidating. He intended, rather to be openly approachable and assessable. Jesus would be a "meek" king. This word, related to "friend," means to be "gentle," "soothing," "allaying," "calming." Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had used this same word of himself when trying to explain the nature and character of his greatness and power.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
For *I am meek* and lowly in heart:
And ye shall find rest unto your souls."¹

Palm Sunday affords us the opportunity to reexamine our view of true greatness and power. We can use Jesus' example on this day to strive a little harder to harmonize our strivings for "greatness," and our use of "power" with Jesus' values. Jesus' example on Palm Sunday should lead us to observe those deemed to be leaders—sacred or secular—and consider how they use power and express power. Those who follow Jesus' example of meekness are worthy of our trust and support. Those who do not are not worthy of our trust and support. Finally, Jesus' example on Palm Sunday reminds us that when we pray we should do so as if approaching a Being who is by his very nature, meek, friendly, soothing, and approachable.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹ Matthew 11.²⁸⁻²⁹