

## Whose Parade Are You In?

[Zechariah 9:9-10; Mark 11:1-11](#)

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Like most Americans, I love a parade! When Carol and I were first married we stayed up all night one New Year's Eve, guarding a dozen folding chairs on Pasadena's Colorado Boulevard so the family could have front row seats for the Rose Parade. Then, of course, I fell asleep before the parade arrived. Not even the USC Marching Band could wake me! I love the Fourth of July parade in the tiny farming town where our oldest daughter used to live. The good people of Deer Park, Washington, don't spend millions on floats as they do in Pasadena. A flat bed truck does just fine, with red, white, and blue bunting all over, and the 4-H queen sitting topside on a bale of hay. I love parades so much that I swapped my accordion for a snare drum in the 7th grade so I could join the marching band and strut my stuff down State Street in Santa Barbara.

We've just read about a rather odd parade: Jesus commandeers a colt in the suburbs and then rides it up the hill into Jerusalem; bystanders shed their coats to spread on the path, while others strip palm branches to lay on the road; the crowd shouts at the top of their lungs, "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." But if this sounds odd, even bizarre, replace Jerusalem Boulevard with Pennsylvania Avenue on January 20, 2005. Replace the donkey with a stretch limo. Replace the cloaks and palm branches with confetti and ticker tape thrown from high rise windows. Replace the "Hosannas" with several hundred thousand people cheering their newly-elected President on the way to his inauguration. Make those swaps and you will understand what's going on in Mark 11. If our tradition calls for a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue when presidents take office, the Hebrews expected their Messiah to march into their capital city in just the manner Mark described. It was all predicted five hundred years earlier by the prophet Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

So this is the Messiah's inaugural parade. When Jesus mounts the colt that Sunday afternoon, he is saying to the people of Jerusalem, "I am your promised king, and this is my royal procession." That's why the crowds cheer him on his way into the city. That's why they spread their clothing on the road ahead of him. Having lived under foreign domination for eight hundred years, they fully expect Jesus to mobilize an army, throw out the Romans, mount the long-vacant throne of David, and usher in a millennium of peace and plenty.

And then a curious thing happens: "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." "Is that it, Jesus? After all that campaigning, you're just going to have a look around and then disappear? We were already measuring you for your imperial robes, and now you leave us standing here? Are you too weak to confront Rome, Jesus? Or too afraid?"

Bitterly disappointed that Jesus left town without confronting Rome, their fervor turned to fury, and when Jesus later stood trial for sedition, the crowd backed the prosecution. Those who shouted "Hosanna" on Sunday yelled "Crucify him" on Friday. What went wrong? Did Jesus mislead them? Not at all. Listen again to Zechariah's prediction: "Your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey." Jesus did not mislead; they misunderstood. They highlighted "triumphant and victorious" while ignoring "humble and riding on a donkey." But in Jesus these two apparently contradictory themes coalesced. In Jesus, victory and humility came together. Jesus approached Jerusalem as the servant king, as the suffering victor. The triumph of Jesus consists, not in the use of naked power to elevate himself. The triumph of Jesus, to quote Paul, lies in the fact that "he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). What Jesus accomplished at Calvary was infinitely greater than any military victory over Caesar and his

legions. Today you can find the Roman Empire only in historical records and archaeological ruins, but you can find Jesus in the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions the world over.

So I ask, "Whose parade are you in?" Because you are marching to someone's drumbeat. There is no neutral ground on life's parade route. There are no reviewing stands where you can munch popcorn while the rest of humanity flows by. You are wearing someone's uniform and striding to someone's cadence. If you choose Jesus as your commanding officer, then make no mistake about who he is. If Jesus had armed himself with weapons and ammunition that day in Jerusalem, if Jesus had forced people to do his bidding, then we would likely march to the same tune, to rely on manipulation and naked force to get our way in the world. If Jesus required people to bow and scrape when he walked by, then we would tend to do the same, to insist that others serve our needs while we disregard theirs. If Jesus had accumulated vast personal wealth, then we would tend to do the same, to acquire and hoard, while ignoring the cries of a hungry world.

But Jesus said of himself, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus, when he was handed the cup of suffering in Gethsemane, prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). And when they forced him to drink the cup at Calvary, he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus contradicts the competitive, dog-eat-dog attitude that dominates our culture. Our culture says, "Do it unto others before they do it unto you." Today's TV programming celebrates this cutthroat mindset. If you can't get the best of the other survivors, you're voted off the island. No collaboration, no teamwork, no mercy. Donald Trump brings you into his boardroom, lays out your shortcomings, and says, "You're fired!" No coaching, no training, no tomorrow. We were out camping a couple of years ago, and I overheard a man sitting next to his luxurious motor home say, "I wonder what the poor are doing tonight; and, frankly, I don't care!" No compassion, no understanding, no shame.

Jesus refutes all such arrogance. His was the strength of selflessness. His was the authority of compassion. His was the power of sacrifice. His was the rule of love. Are you marching in his parade? You can get an inkling from today's One Great Hour of Sharing. Jesus would be first in line to help victims of earthquake, fire and flood, and that's what One Great Hour of Sharing does. Jesus would empty his wallet to feed refugees in Somalia and Sudan, and that's what One Great Hour of Sharing does. Jesus would encourage impoverished people to start a micro business in their village so they could feed and support themselves, and that's what One Great Hour of Sharing does. So when you give generously to One Great Hour of Sharing, you not only benefit the least, the lost, and the left-behind; you show that you're marching in Jesus' parade.

During our staff meeting last Tuesday, Junior McGarrahan told us that when the congregation leaves the American Protestant Chapel in Bonn, Germany, they encounter a sign over the exit door that reads, "Servants' Entrance." When you leave our sanctuary today, look up and imagine seeing that sign above our door, "Servants' Entrance." And when you get out the door, don't just imagine it; do it! Fall in step with the one who came not to be served, but to serve. His name is Jesus, and he very much wants you in his parade.