

## **“Who Is This?”**

### **Matthew 21:1-11**

When they had come near Jerusalem & had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.

If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord hath need of them.’  
And he will send them immediately. ”

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the ass and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

The crowds were saying,  
“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## **“Who Is This?”**

Matthew 21:1-11

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Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

Well, I'll tell you right off this morning, I'm in a bit of an evangelical mood. (*Thank you Jesussss! Can I get an AMEN!?!?*) Now, I know that Easter isn't until next Sunday but it feels to me as if today is the day that I should preach to you about the cross, about the empty tomb, about the first Easter morning, about the resurrection to new life in Christ. These are the fundamental aspects of the Christian life. These are the items of Good News we have to proclaim. This is the Gospel we have to share.

I am tempted to preach on all of that today, because I know that *next* Sunday many of you will have departed Canton to go and be with friends and family (in the most exotic of places, I'm sure!?!). Further, I know that next Sunday the seats which you will leave vacant will be filled to a certain extent by folks who some have called, the High Holy Protestants. Those who are keen to attend church on the high holy days of Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday.

### **II.**

Now don't get me wrong, I'm thrilled when *anyone* comes to church, on *any* day, and for *whatever* reason. However, the simple fact is, preaching to all of you is *far* easier than preaching to folks I may not know as well. You and I have built up a relationship. We have established a rapport. We go back a ways now. Oh, not forever mind you, but long enough that we have shared some history, many special moments, and even a few dark days. You have heard (or read) some of my better sermons, so you cut me some slack when I preach a bad one. You laugh at my jokes, even when they aren't so funny. You know that when I say “Good Morning” I expect to get an enthusiastic “Good Morning” in return. There is an ease between us, a casualness, *and*, I hope, a trust.

### III.

You trust that I say and do things out of a pure heart. I trust that you hear not just my words, but also the message that God is speaking to you through them. Together, we trust that God is making up the difference in whatever area our humanness and imperfection leave us lacking. Next week, however, next week will be a different story. I know, because I've seen it before on Easter. When I make a joke or when I get a little folksy, those who don't know me will just kind of stare at me with furrowed brow and a blank look on their face. They may even raise an eyebrow in puzzlement. I certainly recognize I am a bit paranoid - I've got what's left of a pony-tail and all that, but I can see it in the faces of those in the pews at the high holy services: they look at me, and they want to know, "*Who is this guy?*"

### IV.

In fact, for many years there would be people going through the line to shake my hand and politely ask me, "*Ah, what happened to Dick Stone?*" (*Dick was the pastor here for 29 years before I arrived 27 years ago*). For these folks, Easter Sunday on the Park will be a bit of an eye-opener to some of the new things we are doing, and the new ways we are acting, in this grand old church. In much the same way, that morning Jesus rode in to Jerusalem with all the palms and shouts was an introduction to the new thing that God was doing in the world. 2000 years later, some of the symbolism of that event has been lost to us. To people of that day, however, the parade of palms held a very clear meaning.

### V.

The Mount of Olives, over which Jesus rode on his way to Jerusalem, was understood in Jewish thinking to be the place of messianic judgment and resurrection. The ride itself is a fulfillment of the Prophecy found in Old Testament book Zechariah 9:9: "*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.*" The spreading of clothes on the road harkens back to 2 Kings 9:13, action appropriate at the anointing of a king. So, given all of this symbolism, if you were standing there that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem you would have been pretty oblivious not to realize, that *something* was up. Now for Jesus' disciples, who were always being admonished to keep Jesus' miracles and identity a secret, this day was a triumph.

## VI.

This entry into Jerusalem was that for which they had been waiting all along. No more life in the hinterland with the rubes and the rabble. No more sneaking around, no more dusty feet, no more small towns, *they* were going to the BIG show. Jesus was *finally* making his move. They were going to Jerusalem, that city of cities. Imagine how exciting it was on that day. Our scripture passage from Matthew tells us, “*When Jesus entered Jerusalem the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’*” In spite all the symbolism, though, the Mount of Olives, the ride in on a Donkey, the cloaks and palms and all the Hosannas, none of those in attendance that day came up with the right answer to the question: “Who is this?” Matthew 21: 11, “And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## VII.

That day in Jerusalem, Jesus had come to introduce himself to the world. Not *just* a prophet named Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee, but the long awaited Messiah, Jesus the Christ. The Lamb of God come to take away the sins of the world. The Word who was in the beginning with God through whom all things came into being. The way, the truth....the light. Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day and held out his hand in introduction, but the people saw just another prophet, perhaps even a healer, certainly *not* the savior, however.

## VIII.

In this day and age, many people share the same sentiment. They readily acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet, performed miracles, and was among the wisest humans this world has ever known - but the *savior*?!? Well, they simply don't care to take it *that* far. Pomp and circumstance? *Yep*. Big steeples and going-to-church clothes. ‘*Course*. Palm Sunday? *Love it*. Christmas Eve & Easter Morning? *Every year*. But before I tempt you any more into believing that I am speaking about those High and Holy church-goers who will certainly be among us next week, let me correct you and tell you that I am speaking here mainly of myself and, perhaps, of you as well. You will have to be the judge of that, however.

## IX.

You see, I dig the story, I really do. The sacrifice on the cross, the atonement for the sins of the world, the empty tomb, the resurrection to new life in Christ. When push comes to shove, I'm a *believer*. When I'm with a family in ICU (as I was several times this week), or at the funeral home, or when I am leading worship on Sunday morning, or when I think about seeing my grandmother and mother again in the heavenly realms. In *those* moments, Jesus is indeed the Christ. What gives me trouble, though, are the moments in between. In the boredom, aggravation, and exhaustion of everyday life I start to ask the Palm Sunday Question: "Who is *this* person who rides into my life with palms waving and crowds raving???"

## X.

Do I really believe he is who he says he is - the long awaited Messiah, Jesus the Christ? Is he the Lamb of God who rescues me from sin and gives me a clean heart, and a free mind? Is he the Word who was in the beginning with God through whom all things may still come into being? Even things like forgiveness for my enemies, patience with my family, and unconditional love for those in my care? Is he the Way, a spiritual and physical path by which I may live my life and guide my family? Is he *really* the truth, who can bring peace to the conflicts of the world and the conflicts of my soul? Have I *finally* found the Light that can chase away the darkness of my fears?

We come now to Easter Week, so, tell me, what about *your* moments in between? What do you think? Who is this guy Jesus, and how much are *you* going to believe? Amen.