

Luke 19:28-40**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-24****Introduction**

I don't know if you are the sort of person who likes to make an entrance but I am not. I prefer to slide into a room or event and preferably to have something to do which keeps me inconspicuous.

When I was about 14 my father took my sister and me to a very posh hotel in Munich, where he was living. We swam in the rooftop pool and he left us to get dressed and join him in the Foyer and we would then have a refreshing drink. On the way down we got lost and emerged on the Mezzanine Floor. I looked over the railings and seeing my father below hurried down the stairs to join him. Unfortunately I lost my footing and tumbled head over heels all the way down and landed at his feet. Now that was an entrance! He earned my undying admiration by simply saying, "Oh hello darling, There you are" and taking my hand helped me up.

There are people who plan their entrances and there are some who entrances just happen to. Jesus didn't normally invite attention and was very good at simply slipping away into the crowd when attention became too great for him.

However, this was one occasion when he had carefully planned his entry into Jerusalem and the way it would happen

As we heard in our reading the story began as Jesus and his entourage arrive at Bethphage, an eastern suburb of Jerusalem. Jesus directs two of his disciples to go ahead to the next village (perhaps Bethany) to find a donkey that can be used for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

He was travelling in company with many of his followers, but also with many other Jews who were coming up from their homes all over Israel to the city of Jerusalem for the festival. The journey up was a part of the ceremony and it was the usual practice to enter the city on foot. The pilgrims usually walked in together singing psalms called psalms of ascent as they ascended the hill to the Holy city.

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Jesus however decided that he would depart from custom and he would ride into the city. He had arranged for a donkey to be available for him to use. Some people interpret Jesus' instructions to his disciples as showing some sort of supernatural knowledge which is perfectly possible but it is just as likely that there was some sort of prior arrangement for him to use a donkey. We know that Jesus had friends in Bethany, that's where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived and so it's not an unlikely assumption that Jesus had already put steps in place for his entrance to Jerusalem. It is even likely that the owner of the donkey was travelling in with Jesus and had made the arrangements for him so that the message "the master" (or owner) needs him would enable the servants to let the disciples to take the donkey.

It is clear from all four gospel accounts that it was Jesus who took the initiative in the matter of how he would enter the city. He made a deliberate choice to do something unusual – so it clearly had a special significance for him. So what was his intention?

It is the donkey that is the key to understanding Jesus' intention here. It seems clear he intended to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9

"Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey – on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This is not a "triumphal entry" since there is no white horse, no trophies, no military language or imagery as would be usual in a triumphant entry. Rather, this is a "royal entry." "The heir of David who was to be anointed as king rode a donkey to his coronation." That was true of Solomon who gained David's throne as well as others who sought it like Absalom and Mephibosheth. With unmistakable symbolism, Jesus lays claim to being the authentic Son of David coming to Jerusalem to be anointed as the messianic king.

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Jesus knew that the religious leaders were out to get him and yet instead of slipping into the city under the cover of darkness he rides triumphantly in a manner that is bound to reveal him as Messiah. Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that deliberately set himself in the centre of the stage and deliberately riveted every eye upon himself. All through his last days there is in his every action a kind of magnificent and sublime defiance; and here he begins the last act with a flinging down of the gauntlet, a deliberate challenge to the authorities to do their worst.

Our passage doesn't tell us how the Jewish authorities reacted to Jesus' actions but it does tell us how the bystanders and fellow travelers reacted v8 *"Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches in the fields and spread them in the road."* The bystanders recognise that Jesus' actions proclaimed him to be the promised Messiah and King.

Spreading of garments in his path was a sign of homage to the King of Israel. as we see in 2Kings chapter 9. *"At once Jehu's fellow officers spread their cloaks at the top of the steps for Jehu to stand on, blew trumpets, and shouted, 'Jehu is King!'"*

In the same way that we would expect to put down a red carpet for royalty (and these days celebrities of every sort) the Jewish people would expect to put down their cloaks on the road for their king to tread over. By putting down their garments and the branches for him to ride over the bystanders were endorsing Jesus' symbolic actions. They were showing that they recognised the statement he was making and responded joyously by shouting and singing psalms that took up the theme.

So Jesus was proclaiming himself as the promised Messiah and King yet he was also making a statement about the nature of his kingship. Zechariah's prophecy spoke of a king who would "speak peace to the nations" not a conquering nationalist Messiah. He entered Jerusalem as a king but his majesty was hidden under an outward appearance that was far from kingly. He came on a borrowed, untrained foal, with no leather and

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gold saddle and bridle. His followers had to throw their robes over the donkey for him and so he came with a kingly bearing and yet with meekness and lowliness.

So today, as we celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on his way to die, as we receive our palms and sing hosanna again, what significance do Jesus' actions that first Palm Sunday hold for us.

First: they remind us that Jesus chose his destiny and more than that embraced it.

I think sometimes we can see Jesus as having been rather carried along by events, the innocent victim that had to die to make amends for our sin and failure. But that is far from the case. Jesus, when he came to earth as a human being came with the intention of dying for us and his whole life on earth was moving towards the point when he would be seen to be the promised messiah by dying on a cross.

He made the choice to give himself for us and he embraced that choice, deliberately and whole heartedly. As we walk the path of his last days again this week let's remember that. Let's remind ourselves that Jesus chose to die for us and gave himself totally for our salvation.

Secondly they remind us that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that his coming and dying fulfilled all God's plans for his people.

The events of the last week of Jesus' life are filled with symbolism. All of Jesus' actions and words were carefully chosen and designed to show to his disciples and to us that he was indeed the promised saviour who would rescue God's people and restore them to friendship with him. As we walk the way of the cross this week let's look at his actions and think about his words and remind ourselves again who he is and what he has done for us.

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Thirdly they remind us of the nature of Jesus Kingship. Jesus didn't come in might and power to overthrow the Roman empire. He didn't come in pomp saying to the people he lived amongst "Look I'm God I'm your maker bow down and worship me!" He came humbly and meekly, emptying himself of power, and dignity. He gave himself totally for us and gave away his rights in order to restore us to friendship with him. So as we walk the way of the cross this week let's remind ourselves that this is the nature of the faith that he has called us to. It is one of submission and humble service. As he gave himself for us let us give ourselves to him.