

## Sermon for Palm Sunday 2020

A popular ice-breaker in the many training sessions I have attended was to ask the group which animal represents yourself and say why. I would usually choose a donkey because donkeys are known to be stubborn, apparently not unlike myself on some occasions. This may or may not be a good trait to have depending on your point of view. As a young child I loved to go to the seaside and ride on a donkey on the beach. I rather like donkeys, but there is something about the way they look that makes me feel rather sorry for them. Take for example Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh who incidentally is one of my favourite characters in the A. A. Milne books, though he is humble and quite reliable, he is often made fun of. Despite this I think he is a very lovable character even if he is dismally gloomy and hardly ever seems happy.

Donkeys are not exactly the prettiest of creatures with their oversized ears making them look quite comical and their braying which is hardly melodic. In fact, I would say once heard never forgotten. The donkey is a humble beast that is often the butt of jokes. They are

known for their stubbornness and are thought to be the stupidest of animals. However, contrary to popular belief donkeys aren't as stupid as they seem. In fact, they are quite intelligent and their stubbornness is all about self-preservation. If a donkey senses danger, it will stop and not move until it thinks it is safe to do so.

The theologian and poet G.K. Chesterton, wrote a poem that is quite simply titled *The Donkey*. The poem makes me feel that the donkey is very unappreciated and is mostly rejected by society. The poem is told from the perspective of the donkey who has a very low opinion of himself and thinks himself a creature of the devil.

With all that I have said about donkey's, my question to you today is why would Jesus choose to ride into Jerusalem on a such a lowly creature. Why a donkey instead of a horse, or maybe a white stallion outfitted for battle, or a camel bedecked in sumptuous velvets or why couldn't he even have simply walked.? We can look at it this in another way, Why not a donkey? After all this was a very common means of transport in the ancient world, donkeys were

farm animals and very hard worked they were. So, it really wouldn't have been that unusual? Well maybe not on the surface, scratch beneath the surface of the day's events and the donkey's significance is revealed.

We heard the story of Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem in our first bible reading this morning. In verses 4-5 Mathew tells us exactly why Jesus needed the donkey and the foal, "This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet saying,

Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you  
Humble and mounted on a donkey,  
And on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Mathew was referring to the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. The daughter of Zion is Jerusalem, often called Zion as Mount Zion is Jerusalem's highest and most important hill. For Jews Jerusalem was the holy city of God. Zechariah foretold the manner in which the Jesus would come as King. Jesus really needed the donkey to show that He was and is the Messiah as foretold by the prophets of old.

Riding on a donkey into Jerusalem is the fulfilment of this prophecy.

This wasn't the manner in which a King was expected to arrive. No king had arrived in Jerusalem like this before. Kings arrived in splendour with all the pomp and circumstance that befits royalty. Leaders rode horses if they were going to war but donkeys if they came in peace. Rather than riding to conquer, this king would enter in peace. Also, the donkey connected Jesus to common people. For the Jews living under Roman rule life was not easy especially for the poor. Even in this triumphant moment Jesus came with humility and meekness identifying with weakest and poorest of society. The use of the donkey was a way of showing that Jesus was on the same level as the people. In choosing to ride on a donkey Jesus left the crowds who were following him in no doubt who he was Israel's Messiah. Riding into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt was one of the most obvious signs he could give them. The crowds think this is the day Israel will be restored. They shout Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven, Hosanna is a cry of salvation and most often is translated as save us. Is this the moment of salvation the oppressed Jews have been waiting for? The people believe so. Jesus brings them hope of a new Kingdom-a kingdom without oppression and freedom from the dominion of Rome.

Back to the Donkey poem,

The crowds present on that first Palm Sunday understood why Jesus choose to ride on a donkey, In Mathew they shout Hosanna to the Son of David

The Donkey (G.K. Chesterton)

When fishes flew and forests walked  
And figs grew upon thorn,  
Some moment when the moon was blood

Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry  
And ears like errant wings,  
The devil's walking parody  
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,  
Of ancient crooked will;  
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,  
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;  
One far fierce hour and sweet:  
There was a shout about my ears,  
And palms before my feet.