

And when he had said these things, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount which is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying,
"Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat.
Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' You shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"
So those who were sent away, found it just as he had told them.
And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them,
"Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it."
And they brought the colt to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.
And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

As he was drawing near - already on the way down the Mount of Olives - the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying,
"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"
And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"
He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!"
And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying,
"Would that you, even you, had known this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.
For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade, and surround you,
and hem you in from every side and dash you down on the ground, you and your children among you,
And they will not leave one stone upon another among you, because you did not know the day of your visitation."

Luke 19:28-44

"...The Day of Your Visitation"

In Luke's gospel, the story of Palm Sunday actually begins way down in Jericho, deep in the Jordan River Valley, more than 1500 feet below Zion, the hilltop sanctuary city where soon Jesus would offer himself as that Passover Lamb whose sacrifice would *"take away the sins of the world."* And Luke goes to great trouble to warn his readers that everything Jesus will do in the holy city the week before Passover will defy what old Israel was looking for in a Savior, beginning in Jericho where Jesus scandalized the locals by selecting Zacchaeus, a tax collector, to hold a luncheon for Jesus and his disciples.

The topsy turviness of what Jesus did and said that first holy week prompt Matthew, Mark and Luke to check a box that Moses had left in Deuteronomy 18 for God's people to check if they ever were not sure whether some person sent to them by God was for real. Moses had taught them; *"...if you say in your heart, 'How can we recognize the word that the LORD has not spoken?'"* And Moses went on, *"If a prophet speaks a word that does not come to pass or come true, that is a word the LORD has not spoken."* So near the end of his long climb out of Jericho, Jesus begins an exercise designed to check Moses' box in his disciples' minds.

Jesus stops on the far side of Mt. Olive, east of the city, and he sends two of his men into one of two villages there, and he predicts, sight unseen, that they will find a donkey tied in front of its owner's house, and he tells them to go up without asking and just untie the beast. In ancient society, this was the moral equivalent of grand theft auto. But Jesus goes on to predict that the owners will stir from their inattention to ask Jesus' men what they mean by just untying a beast that wasn't theirs in the middle of the day!

And Jesus commands them to tell the owners, *"The Lord has need of it."* And Luke tells us with a sense of wonder that it all happened just as Jesus, the prophet, *"had told them."* Now there was a custom that rabbi's could requisition animals temporarily for sacred purposes, so what the disciples asked of the owners wasn't unheard-of, but it was unheard-of to untie the animal before you'd even asked. And the point of the exercise was for Jesus to check Moses' prophetic box for his own men on a day he knew would test their faith. And what Jesus' prophesied about the colt and the willing owners wasn't the first prophecy in play.

In Genesis 49, 1800 years before Jesus, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had sat on his death bed and prophesied to his 12 sons that one of them, Judah, would be the father of Israel's kings. Listen to old Jacob's words, he sang, *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you...your father's sons shall bow down to you... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him... the obedience of the peoples...binding his foal to the vine, his colt to the choice vine."* So all those centuries before, Jacob knew that a donkey colt would be there when God sent his King to save the world.

800 years after Jacob, in the book of 1st Kings, David would find himself an old king aging out in a crisis. One of his sons, Adonijah, had staged a coup and the only way David could preserve his line was to convince the people that Solomon was God's choice to be the next king. So what did David do? He remembered Jacob's prophecy and found a donkey colt and sent Solomon out to Mount Olive, to the same highway that Jesus would use a thousand years later, and on that day Levites sang Solomon on a donkey into the city, in a parade not very different than the disciples would give Jesus a thousand years later.

The point being that the Lord really did have need of a donkey that day. Because, Moses taught us, when a real prophet makes a real prophecy it will come to pass even if it takes almost 2000 years. So the Pharisees in the crowd saw the donkey, saw the disciples spreading their cloaks on the road, heard the crowds singing our Call to Worship, Psalm 118. And I think the rabbi's had read about Solomon's coronation in 1st Kings, and I think they probably remembered that Jacob had sung in Genesis of a Savior who would come with a donkey in tow. And the rabbi's response was to rush out into the highway and tell Jesus to make them stop!

After all, it doesn't pay to underestimate how thick and dull people can be to prophecy being fulfilled right in front of their eyes. Imagine that you're in charge, think that what you know is all you'll need, and you'll be oblivious to Apostles and Prophets and Saviors all when God sends them your way. It is amazing the extent to which what happens between our ears is determined by what we've already decided in our hearts. It was Coronation Day for Jesus, that descendant of Judah, that Son of David, sent by God on a donkey to rule a kingdom which would soon reach the ends of the earth and the depths of hell to save people like you and me.

Jesus knew that the parade had come and gone and most of the people he longed to reach were still without a clue. So next came a word of prophecy that would come true, would come to pass before the children who had danced him into the city would have time to become old: *"For the days will come upon you,"* Jesus said, *"when your enemies will set up a barricade, and surround you, and hem you in from every side and dash you down on the ground, you and your children among you..."*

The point being that Jesus wasn't so angry at the people who would crucify him that week that he couldn't weep for the children who would pay the price for their folly. Jesus wept because his Father had shown him that within a generation the Romans would build siege ramps against the holy city, and breach its walls, and tear apart the old temple, stone by stone, just as the Babylonians had done some 600 years before. So he said to the people as he rode his donkey toward his Father's house, *"...they will not leave one stone upon another among you, because you did not know the day of your visitation."*

The point being that we don't get an infinite number of chances to recognize that Christ is king and we are lost without him. The truth be told, most of us get more chances than we deserve, but none of us get an infinite number of chances to give our lives to Christ. Every time we hear God's Word, every time our heart pulls us to get closer to God, it is Christ come calling for us. And none of us knows whether we will hear God's Word again, none of us knows when our heart might stop yearning and the parade will go by and we will have missed him.