

Seated on a Donkey's Colt

By Linda Rex

March 24, 2024, Palm Sunday | Preparation for Easter or Lent—This morning as I was reading one of the passages for this Palm Sunday, Mark 11:1–11, I was struck by the marvel of Jesus riding a donkey's colt which had never been ridden before. Indeed, the more I thought about, the more astonished I became that he was even able to ride the young animal at all.

I suppose it is possible that the colt was familiar with Jesus, but even so, most animals are not thrilled about having things placed on their back such as the cloaks and coats which the disciples threw over the back of this colt. Not to mention having to bear the weight of a human being, which is normally a new and frightening experience for an untrained, full-grown donkey or horse. Perhaps these are stereotyped concepts, but what I recall about donkeys having things placed on their back which they don't want there, is that those items or people ultimately end up back on the ground, unceremoniously dumped off by the animal.

But in this remarkable event, the disciples place their garments on the colt, and Jesus climbs on. The crowds of people are throwing clothing and tree branches on the ground in front of this animal, while shouting and singing and waving branches around. What kind of animal would take this calmly, especially when it had never been ridden before? Perhaps the only answer is what Jesus told the Jewish leaders of his day who complained about all the hubbub, that if he wasn't praised by the people, the stones themselves would cry out.

Creation knows its Maker, and celebrates its Sustainer and Provider in each moment simply by being who and what it is—his creation. The trees and bushes, and plants praise God simply by doing what trees, bushes and plants do—raise their heads towards the sun, put on leaves and flowers, bear fruit, breathing in the carbon dioxide and breathing out oxygen as their participation in God's provision for this planet and its inhabitants. The animals praise God simply by being what God created each of them to be—and here this donkey had the privilege of doing something special for its Creator—bearing the King of Israel into Jerusalem while the people shouted “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

It's significant that Jesus did this entry into Jerusalem on the back of this young donkey. Jesus chose a colt of a donkey, to show his humility. He allowed the people to joyfully express their understanding of the prophetic significance of the spring festival, even though he knew that the Passover lamb that year would be something other than what anyone there expected. The Lamb of God would lay down his life and be crucified at the hands of those whom he had made.

As human beings, we so often get our focus upon our human kingdoms. We make our plans and have our expectations about how things are going to work out. We may even tell God how it's going to be—letting God know what needs to be done when and how and why. We dress it all up in religious fervor at times, and don't even realize that what we are dreaming of and hoping for and expecting isn't at all what God has in mind.

In God's economy, the path to glory is not through the palm frond laden streets of the city. The path to glory, when God is in it, is not always filled with shouts of adulation and praise. I am learning that often God's path to glory is the path into and through death to resurrection. First must come the humiliation, service, and sacrifice. Then will come the exaltation.

In the second gospel reading for this Sunday, John 12:12–16, we see that it took Jesus' resurrection, his giving of the Spirit, and his revelation of the Scriptures before the disciples began to understand that what Jesus went through was long predicted in the prophetic Word. The One who holds all things together, to whom creation gives its praise, took the path of humility

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for our sakes, because of his love and grace. And even a humble colt of a donkey knew that he was safe in his Creator's hands and did his part, for the glory and praise of his Lord, the King of all.

Creator and Sustainer of all that is, thank you for giving us life. Grant us the grace to remember who we are—those created by you to share life with you, to be loved by you and so to love others. May we learn rest in simply being those you created us to be—your beloved children—and to do as you ask in every moment, through Jesus our Lord and by your Spirit. Amen.

“As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ you say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately he will send it back here.’ They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. Some of the bystanders were saying to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: ‘Hosanna! “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!’ Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.” Mark 11:1–11 NASB

“On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, ‘Hosanna! “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”, even the King of Israel.’ Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.’ These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.” John 12:12–16 NASB