

Happy Palm Sunday, Everyone, Today is a day to celebrate, wave palms, parade, dance, sing, throw cloaks, gather with family, have a picnic, enjoy the sunshine, watch the entrance to the Holy City as Jesus comes riding into town on a donkey. Oh! What a day it is today, the celebrating, the fun, and the magic of it all.

It seems to me that one of the main things in this familiar story that most people know by heart is the donkey—Jesus preferred mode of transportation for the day. I looked some facts up about donkeys.

- 1. Donkeys have excellent memories. They can remember people, places, and things up to 25 years in the past.**
- 2. They digest 95% of their food, which means waste isn't good for fertilizer.**
- 3. They can run 24 kms per hour**
- 4. They are territorial and loyal. Farmers often have a donkey around to guard the other animals.**
- 5. Their big ears help to keep them calm because they can hear sounds from far away and their ears help to dissipate heat.**
- 6. Donkeys were domesticated by the Egyptians over 5000 years ago.**
- 7. Donkeys are social animals and need the company of other animals.**

Donkeys are such interesting animals. They are social, self aware, and they have a reputation for stubbornness. The stubbornness of a donkey is said to have saved the life of one of the Old Testaments less than glorious prophets, named Balaam. The story of Balaam is found in the Hebrew Scriptures in the Book of Numbers chapter 22-24. Have a look at it sometimes it is a good story. Here is the Cole's notes version:

Balaam was a non-Israelite lower prophet and was believed to be a soothsayer and the ability to curse people and even whole nations.

The Moabite King sent for Balaam and gave him the directive to curse the Israelites and sent Balaam and his donkey on their way. The Lord appeared to this less than glorious prophet and gave him different instructions. But Balaam decided the new instructions were just too difficult and he set out to do the King's bidding.

The Lord was angry at Balaam for not obeying instructions. When Balaam tried to go with some Moabite officials against the God's wishes an angel was sent to stand in his way. Balaam's donkey saw the angel and turned off the road.

Balaam was furious so he beat the donkey to get it back on the road. Two more times the angel blocked the way. The donkey stopped and two more times Balaam thought the donkey was being stubborn and he once again took action to get the donkey back on the road.

Then, The Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel. Balaam said to the angel, I have sinned, I did not realize you were blocking me. The angel told Balaam go with the men but speak only what I tell you.

The reason I am focusing on donkeys this morning is that in the Hebrew Scriptures, Zechariah prophesied that one day the messiah would arrive on a donkey. "Rejoice Daughter Zion, shout Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you riding on a donkey."

As they approached Jerusalem. Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a donkey and a colt tied there. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this? Say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back."

They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus and laid their cloaks over it for him to sit on. Many people spread their cloaks on the road and others spread palm branches. They shouted Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Oh! What a party!

Palm Sunday is also a story of great humility. On the other side of the Holy City, Pilate was entering the city gates on a great stallion, while Jesus was riding on a donkey.

Pilate was surrounded by security forces showing the full might of the Roman Empire. Pilate and his soldiers did not seem to care where their horses' hooves landed. The people were in danger.

Jesus was surrounded by unnamed people waving palm branches and riding on a donkey. These people were throwing their cloaks on the ground. A significant act because most people would have only owned one cloak. A cloak had multiple uses—a blanket for warmth and protection from the hot sun. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to demonstrate his connection with the people

Pilate's soldiers sneered; Jesus' followers sang hosanna!

No greater contrast can be made between this world and the kingdom of God. Brute force versus gentle caring.

Yet it was clear he was announcing to the world that he is the messiah. The religious authorities were threatened because they knew about Zechariah's prophecy. They knew that some of the people that were welcoming Jesus that day were hoping that he was the one who would deliver them from the Roman occupation. There were others that believed Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The problem with Palm Sunday is that the excitement of the crowds didn't last very long. Soon the happy crowds disappeared, the funny little donkey and the colt were returned to its owner, the music, food, dancing, people disappeared, The people hid behind closed doors because they were afraid they might be

identified as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. What will happen next.

A short time later many of the same voices that shouted hosanna would soon be shouting crucify him, crucify him give us Barabas. Mobs are like

that one moment singing and laughing. the next shouting ugly words and doing ugly things.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to signify he is the Messiah and to usher in a time of peace and hope for a broken world. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing that he set in motion events that would be irreversible. This humble man who sought to bring only love and compassion would die the cruelest of deaths.

As we gather on Palm Sunday. Let's raise our palms high and shout hosanna and bow our heads as we enter into Holy Week. The meal of Maundy Thursday awaits us; the pain of good Friday will be difficult but there is hope. May

God bless each of us as we continue our Journey into Holy Week. Amen