

Palm Sunday

Isaiah 42:1-4

April 13, 2025 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Rejoice in Your Humble Hero

When Hurricane Harvey hit Florida a while ago, there was a lot of flooding. Colette Sulcer and her 3-year-old daughter were driving but got stuck in high water. When Colette and her daughter got out of the car, they were swept ½ mile away from the car. Rescue divers saw them floating away. The rescuers managed to reach the two, but the mother, Colette, was unresponsive and died. The 3-year-old daughter was suffering from hypothermia, but recovered and is doing well. Witnesses clearly saw Colette struggling to keep her daughter above the water. They explained she, “absolutely saved the child’s life.”<sup>1</sup>

Colette was willing to sacrifice her life to save her daughter. I think most mothers would have done the same thing. She was a hero to her little daughter. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, he was serving as our hero. He was willing to lay down his life in order to save us. Jesus did not need to ride a donkey into Jerusalem in order to save us. Yes, he fulfilled the prophecy from Zechariah, but God did not need to give that prophecy. Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem and that was it. The crowds dispersed as Jesus and his disciples went back to Bethany. Jesus was simply sending a message. Certainly he was true God. For example, he knew where the donkey was and the donkey that had never been ridden submitted to him. And yet, Jesus was very humble. He did not give a rousing speech. He did not rally the people to a revolution. He was not greeted by the rich and famous in Jerusalem. As we sang in the first stanza of our first hymn:

No tramp of soldier’s marching feet with banners and with drums,

No sound of music’s martial bet: “The King of glory comes!”

To greet what pomp of kingly pride no bells in triumph ring,

No city gates swing open wise.

Jesus didn’t even own the donkey; it was just borrowed. In our Old Testament reading, it says that (:2), “**He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.**” Jesus was our hero, but he was humble about it.

When you have celebrated several dozen Palm Sundays, it’s easy to become “ho-hum” about it. When you hear time and time again that Jesus

forgives you and you are saved, it’s easy to shrug your shoulders as if it’s no big deal. The joy of salvation can easily be lost. It happens. I think that a review of Isaiah 42:1-4 will lead us to rejoice in our humble hero.

### He establishes justice

Chapter 42 begins with God the Father pointing to Jesus (:1), “**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him.**” That sounds like a summary of what God the Father said about Jesus at his baptism. This is talking about Jesus 700 years before he was born. Three times in this short section, it says that Jesus will give “**justice.**” The word “**justice**” refers to a legal decision of right, holy, or innocent. As I do prison ministry, I’ve realized that all the inmates understand the concept of standing before a judge as he reads what you’ve done wrong. No one likes that. Imagine standing in front of God the judge as he reads everything you’ve done wrong and ... everyone here in church would be in the gallery listening. We would not like that.

In China, just the top one-tenth of 1 per cent controls close to half of the country’s money. Nearly everyone is struggling to survive. If you happen to be wealthy though, you do not worry about standing in front of the judge. A while ago a hospital president who caused a deadly traffic accident hired an employee’s father to “confess” and serve as his stand-in. In another case, after hitting and killing a motorcyclist, a man driving without a license hired a substitute for roughly \$8000. If you are rich and commit a crime, you can simply pay someone else to be your substitute. They will go to court and go on trial for you and then pay whatever punishment is decided. Technically it’s not allowed, but everyone knows that it happens. They call this practice: *ding zui* = substitute criminal.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus became our substitute criminal, our *ding zui*. He did NOTHING wrong, and yet he was treated as if he was the world’s worst criminal. In a way he was. All of our sin and guilt was blamed on him. As Jesus hung on the cross, he was punished for all of our sins. Since he paid for all of your sins, that means they are gone. There is nothing left for God to punish. Your sins are forgiven. You have nothing to fear. God is not going to punish you. Nor is he going to read a list of all your sins so everyone can hear what you’ve done wrong. Here in Isaiah 42, God said that Jesus would (:1), “**bring justice to the nations.**” In other words, this message

<sup>1</sup> <https://people.com/human-interest/miracle-toddler-mother-died-saving-her-hurricane-harvey/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/world/do-the-crime-pay-someone-else-to-do-the-time-20120806-23puh.html>

of salvation is not just for the Jewish nation, but for all the nations in the world, for all people of all time. Jesus brought justice to you. You can be sure that you are saved. If you were on trial, God would look in your file and declare that you are innocent.

Jesus gave his life to save us. He is our hero. And he was so humble as he saved us. Throughout his life on earth, he did not enjoy a lavish life-style. He was especially humble as he was betrayed by his friend, mistreated by his own people, put on trial for something he did not do wrong, had his back shredded by a whip, was falsely condemned, and then crucified. A few chapters later, Isaiah said that Jesus (53:7), “**was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**” He did not complain. He is our humble hero who saved us. That fills us with joy and gladness even if the weather is gloomy or our favorite team loses or you don’t like your life situation. No matter what, we rejoice that Jesus gave us justice.

#### He helps the hurting.

Our Savior Jesus is so humble, gentle and concerned that he helps the hurting. God explained (:3), “**a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.**” Maybe there are times when you feel like a bruised reed. Maybe others have hurt you and left you bruised either physically or especially emotionally. Maybe life has thrown you some curveballs and all of your dreams and ambitions are crushed. Maybe health problems literally leave you in pain every day. Maybe your impending death leaves you nervous. Maybe your marriage leaves you frustrated even though you are trying to be the best spouse you can be. Maybe your children or grandchildren are breaking your heart. Maybe your conscience keeps reminding you of shameful sins you committed.

Or, maybe you feel like a smoldering wick, burned out from the daily grind of life. Or maybe this never-ending chilly weather has worn you down. Maybe your job is slowly sucking the life out of you. Maybe being a mother has left you constantly exhausted and frustrated. Maybe the stress that just permeates our culture leaves you anxious and worried. Maybe your taxes aren’t quite done yet. Maybe you’re carrying a load of debt and you can’t imagine how you’ll ever crawl out from under it. Maybe you feel exhausted just thinking about your list of unfinished things to do around the house. The effects of sin in our world hit everyone in different ways at different times.

If a reed, or stem of your rose bush, gets bruised when the lawn mower gets too close to it, how would you deal with it? Would you get some sort of splint – like a toothpick or straw – and tie it to the stem and then carefully check on it each day, adjusting things until it healed and was strong again? Or, would you think, “That stem is damaged, I’ll just cut it off?” I’m guessing you would do the latter. It’s much quicker and easier. Besides, there are lots of other stems. No one would notice one of them missing. But God notices you, as an individual, and wants to help. He cares about you.

If a candle was smoldering, would you take the time to gently feed it with oxygen until a flame reemerged? Or, would you simply get another match or lighter and start over? It would be much easier simply to re-light the wick. But Jesus was not interested in what was easier. He was interested in what was best for you. He was interested in saving you. Therefore, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey demonstrating to the whole world that he was not interested in overpowering us, but in saving us. He is our hero, but he is our humble hero whom we can approach with freedom and confidence. Because of Jesus, we know that all of the issues that frustrate us will one day be gone. Jesus lived, died and rose again so that you can rise after you die and live forever in heaven. That great good news can keep us moving forward day by day and even smiling once in a while. When life feels overwhelming, when your sins nag at you, when you don’t know how you’re going to solve your problems, when you don’t feel loved, when the specter of death is haunting you, look at Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and rejoice in your humble hero. Amen.