

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”--Zechariah 9:9

Jesus was many things, a faith healer, a teacher, a prophet, but one descriptor that is often further down the list is scholar. Jesus was deeply steeped in Jewish tradition and scripture. Sure, all who were faithful knew the scripture, but not in the same way that Jesus *knew* the scripture. He knew how to utilize the scripture to prove a point, often too well, even once receiving death threats in his own home town for the way he interpreted the scripture to those gathered in the synagogue with him. In being a textual scholar, Jesus also knew deeply the words of the prophets, specifically those words that spoke of the coming Messiah. These words pop up throughout the retelling of Jesus’ ministry in the gospels to both validate and emphasize the ministry of Christ, but it is not too hard a stretch to believe that Jesus was the one who first used the scriptures to teach, both explicitly and implicitly. Perhaps the gospel writers are not simply trying to prove a point to their readers, but rather relaying how in tune with his own understanding of self, so in tune that he would utilize the scriptures proclaiming the coming Messiah as a means to influence and make change in the lives of those he touched through his ministry on this earth. So in tune that he would sit atop a donkey as he entered into Jerusalem.

Jesus knows the words spoken through the prophets, knows that these words are to be fulfilled through his actions, but, Jesus also utilizes these words, words he knows as they have been passed down in the scriptures, as a form of protest, for he is not the only one who knows the scriptures. The religious authority of the time, those whom Christ often clashed and conflicted with, were not unaware of what was written in the scriptures. To be the religious authorities required a deep, intimate knowledge of the scriptures and how they were to be understood within the cultural context of the time. They were not simply the authority through smart politicking and advantages of privilege, they had to be able to back that authority up with knowledge. The people demanded to be led by those who knew what they were talking about, and the religious authority of the time were those people.

But they weren't the only ones who knew of the scripture. The people may not have known the scriptures in quite the same way as the religious authority, but they too knew the scriptures (perhaps they were like modern-day Episcopalians, knowledgeable to a great depth, but not in the same relationship with the scriptures like a fundamental evangelist). The people know of Zechariah. The people know of Jesus. And in knowing the scripture and seeing the man before them, they strip off their cloaks, they cut down branches from the trees, they lay them down on the ground for a man on a donkey to ride across, as they shout to him Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David, the rightful heir of the great King of Israel! Hosanna in the highest!

It is this declaration of Hosanna that is declared in protest by the people that will also mark the beginning of the trouble that Christ is to face this week. Hosanna is one of the rare instances in scripture where an aramaic proclamation survives into the greek that the

gospels were written in. Hosanna! the people cry out; Save, I pray! Help, I pray! they call out to the Lord. Hosanna! declares the crowd as the rabble begins to rouse. Save us in this time, help us, heal us, touch us, teach us.

It is in this word of Hosanna that the people declare their allegiance to this prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. It is in this word of Hosanna that the people both acknowledge the reality of Jesus, of God among them, and condemn him to the fate that was always predestined for him. For it is in this word that the religious authority hears an unruly mob rising up. It is in this word that they see Jesus inciting a riot. It is in this word that they know Jesus is inspiring a movement, a movement that could only challenge their authority, challenge their place, challenge the delicate balance they had brokered with the occupying Roman government, a balance which if unsettled would surely spell destruction for all of these people who are crying Hosanna! in the streets. It is a distraction, he is a distraction.

There is a great amount of power in this word of distraction. It is a word used by the powerful to silence those with less, whether it be the oppressed, the lesser educated, the common folk, it is not good to be seen as a distraction, for distractions lead away from God, distractions lead away from our common good, distractions destroy good people if they are not ignored. The religious authority sees this distraction in the streets and seeks to diminish, disrupt, demean the power that is being given to Christ as the crowd greets him at the gates to the city, who lead him into town as if he were Caesar himself. For here we have a city in turmoil, and it is up to the religious authority to keep it from exploding.

The whole of Jerusalem is in turmoil. There is great unrest. Jerusalem stands on the edge of the cliff, precariously holding on, unbalanced and unsure, an emotional powder keg into which Jesus arrives, potentially marking the reign of a new king. And this creates within Jerusalem great joy and great fear pushing against one another.

Those on the fringes, the poor, the oppressed, the suffering, are excited that this man Jesus, he of the stories that have spread across the region, a healer, a prophet, has finally come to be amongst them, to take his rightful place as their new religious authority (even if he has no intention of doing so, at least not in any physical sense). Stories of his ministry have traveled, hope has spread.

The authority is nervous, anxious, even angry that Jesus has come to the city. The stories of his ministry have traveled, and their fear has spread. They were able to keep him at arm's length when he was out in the country. They felt there was an understanding: feel free to do your thing out in the country so-called prophet. But, now he dares to come to the city. Who does this man think he is? And, could he actually supplant them, supplant their authority. This is not necessarily even a fear of Jesus, prophets tend to come and go after all, rather they fear that the people who shout Hosanna! to Christ will simply stop listening to them, stripping their authority.

Jesus' entry into a city in turmoil will set the stage for the most remembered week in human history. This entrance of Jesus sets the mood for this coming week. The interactions that Jesus will have with the religious authority in the upcoming days are all predicated on this entrance into the city. Jesus has made a statement about himself, to the people, to the religious authority, and will back up this statement through his interactions his week.

In many ways this entrance seals the fate that awaits Christ at week's end. This entrance draws the attention of the entire city upon one man, a prophet, a healer, a teacher. It asks the question, is he more? When the people shout Hosanna! do they know who Christ truly is? When the religious authority take in this scene, do they fear Christ because of who he is now, or because of who he proclaims to be?

Jesus knows that this entrance into Jerusalem will mark the beginning of the end, and yet he rides on in majesty. This is Jesus' final protest to the religious authority of the time. This is Jesus' symbol of his true identity for all to see and hear. These are the footsteps we are called to follow. To stand against the authority of our time and proclaim the truth of God in this world. To proclaim Hosanna! as we move out into our world, so that all may hear our praise of Christ, the honor we bestow upon him, the truth to power that we must proclaim.

Do we have the tenacity, the audacity to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to respond to the powerful when they seek to diminish? Do we have the tenacity, the audacity to shout Hosanna! in the streets, knowing full well that it will draw the attention of the powerful, that it will run counter-culture, that it will make us a target for upsetting the status-quo, of exploding the city that is in turmoil?

We must have this tenacity, this audacity to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and we can do so through Christ who empowers us, who strengthens us, has given us the ability to do so. Go out into the streets and shout Hosanna! knowing that your declaration of Save, I pray! Help, I pray! will be answered.

Amen.