

Mark D. Reichert

Palm Sunday – Matthew 21:1-11 – Your King Comes in Meekness and Majesty  
4/2/23 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

Have you ever heard that poem by Sylvia Dunstan called *Christus Paradox*? It's really kind of fascinating. It's a poem that marvels at how, in order to understand Jesus, you have to embrace so many paradoxes – so many statements that at first glance might seem absurd or contradictory, but still express a truth. Listen to what she wrote:

*You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd. You, Lord, are both prince and slave.  
You, peacemaker and swordbringer Of the way you took and gave.  
You the everlasting instant; You whom we both scorn and crave.*

And this poem only presents a tiny fraction of the paradox that was the life of Christ. It's really a matter of perspective – to the outsider, Jesus didn't seem like anything particularly special, until you got to know him and what he was about and what he was here to do. Then your perspective changed. Then the paradox that was Jesus really started to blow your mind. Why would the Good Shepherd put himself in the place of the lamb for slaughter? Why would the Prince of Peace make himself a slave to his creation?

Case in point of the Christus paradox – Palm Sunday. Even the casual observer could tell that what happened on this day was the stuff of kings – crowds of people lined the streets just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus and shouting praise to his name. But the externals just didn't quite add up. Who was this guy? What's that he's riding? Where did he come from, where is he going, and with what intentions? There's obviously something much bigger going on here than what meets the eye, they might think. And they'd be right. What was happening was that the paradox of Jesus' life was playing out right before their very eyes, but it was no real contradiction. The truth of it speaks to believing hearts who really know the Scriptures and really know their Savior: behold, your King comes in meekness and yet in majesty.

So that day as Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, he stopped the group at the crest of the Mount of Olives as soon as the city came into view. Before they went any further, Jesus had to do something that was foretold over 500 years earlier by the prophet Zechariah. So he called a huddle with two

of his disciples and sent them ahead to the next village to bring back a donkey for him to ride on the rest of the way into Jerusalem. Now ordinarily a donkey was a suitable ride, more practical than flashy. It was a beast of burden, so today it'd be a lot like a station wagon or a minivan. It would get you from point A to point B with plenty of cargo in tow, but it wasn't exactly a top-of-the-line ride for royalty that would turn any heads or impress anybody. And that was especially true about this one! This donkey hadn't even been broken in yet, in fact had never even been used, and so it probably wouldn't have been very comfortable or cooperative. And on top of that, it was borrowed – the disciples had to return it as soon as they were done using it. Yes, humble meekness certainly would have described that scene well.

But then some followers who were walking along with the group started connecting the dots. Didn't the prophet Zechariah say this was going to happen? "*Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" Yes, there's definitely something more to this than Jesus just wanting to take a load off his feet for a while. Jesus was riding along this path in full view of Jerusalem to present himself as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Lord's true Savior-King!

It's just that Jesus would be a very unique type of king. He didn't come holding a sword or bow, but like Zechariah said, he came righteous and having salvation. He came as a great paradox—the mighty king who rode into battle in meekness, intent on dying for his people. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to declare himself the promised Messianic King, he came with no ambitions of empire and no over-the-top grandeur. He came only in the name of the LORD, to serve *his* purposes, to fight and conquer our real, spiritual enemies – and so that meant he had to go to his death. He was exactly the king we needed.

But that's not the type of king everyone wanted. They didn't want God's type of King; they wanted a made-to-order king who would bring back the glory days of Israel, just like King David. And within a few days, when it became more obvious that Jesus wasn't going to be the king Israel was clamoring for, he quickly fell out of favor. The shouts of praise the city raised to him that Sunday were by the

following Friday shouts from an angry mob to “Crucify!” And Jesus knew that was coming, yet in meekness he still rode on to die. See, that was all part of the plan. This king would die a criminal’s death so that his sinful subjects could live like kings in heaven. What a paradox!

Jesus came to Jerusalem in meekness to die, but the story didn’t end with him being rejected and killed. No, his was a story of ultimate victory, because when Jesus died, he won for us salvation and eternal life. See, the paradox of Jesus’ life was that he came in meekness to die on the cross—but he also came in majesty to reign from it. Now he hid his majesty behind humility for much of his life, but make no mistake about it. His majesty was there for all the world to see.

And that’s the way it was even all the way back on that crest of the Mount of Olives. Did you ever wonder why Jesus sent those two disciples ahead to get a donkey and bring it back, when he could have just grabbed it on his way through? It’s because Jesus wanted to show all of us the power and majesty that he had as the Son of God. Jesus wanted us to know that he certainly was a King, but he was a king who had an altogether different and greater purpose than most expected.

So Jesus told the disciples: *“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”* And when it all happened just as Jesus said, and only at Jesus’ name did the owners agree to let the disciples take the colt, those disciples must have come back to Jesus blown away once again at their Savior’s greatness.

They must have been amazed at the paradox. No matter how lowly he looked or how shamefully he was going to be treated, this wasn’t just some popular rabbi sitting on a donkey. No, the God who knows all and sees all and controls all—that God was with them there in the flesh. God himself mounted that donkey and rode on, with a very definite plan to fulfill prophecy and die to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. This King came to reign as the Messiah promised long ago.

And that day... that day the people got it. Jesus rode into the city that was his own with a majesty meant only for the Messiah. People lined

the roads and threw their cloaks down before him in honor. They cut down palm branches for his path and waved them in the air to welcome their king. That day they gave Jesus all the glory that he rightly deserves: *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* they shouted. They called him the Messiah, and they called him their Savior.

See that’s what they meant when they rang out with that famous Palm Sunday cry, *“Hosanna!”* That’s a Hebrew word that means *“Save us!”* And they were shouting that word to just the right person, because that’s exactly why Jesus was there – he was God’s answer to our hosannas. And with every new hoof print on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus’ majesty as our Savior-King shined through that much more clearly. That’s because our King’s majesty isn’t like the kingdoms of this world. It wasn’t a seat in some palace that Jesus rode on to take, but he rode on to be enthroned and to reign from the cross.

You see, our King’s majesty is a great and loving paradox. Our King doesn’t lord over his subjects like so many others, but he serves them and sacrifices himself for them. Our King conquers and defends us from sin, death, and the devil, and he wins for us forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation. His kingdom isn’t measured by square miles or border markers, but by souls. Ours is the King of heaven and earth who laid down all that power and glory for our sake and marched on to death for us. Friends, Jesus’ kingly majesty shines out most brilliantly as God’s promised Messiah who so loved this world that he willingly humbled himself and gave his life to bring you into his heavenly Kingdom forever. Your king came in meekness and majesty—for you, to answer your cry of *“Hosanna,” “Lord, save us!”*

Yes, the scene on that first Palm Sunday might have seemed strange, even contradictory, at first. But we have a greater type of King. Our King is *Christus Paradox* – Jesus, the lowly prophet from Nazareth in Galilee, who came in meekness and majesty as God’s perfect answer to all our hosannas. This is the type of King we have: the type who rides in on a lowly donkey to the acclaim of all nations; the type who rules over all creation for the good of his Church, enthroned on the wood of a cross. So today with believing hearts, let’s join with the crowds and give Christ the glory due our Savior-King, *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”* Amen.