

“Why Did He Ride?”

Many of us have heard the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a multitude of Palm Sundays. But, as the sermon title asks, “Why Did He Ride?” That question is not just about his reason for riding instead of walking into Jerusalem. For example, why did he even go to Jerusalem at that time? If it was necessary for him to make a grand entrance into Jerusalem, why did he come riding a colt? Luke was a Greek and not a Jew, so I suspect he was not aware of the Jewish background for the prophecy from Zechariah, which is related to the king humbly riding on a donkey. However, Luke could not bring himself to report Jesus rode on a donkey for he only used the term for “colt”, instead of donkey. Also, it would have been so much more impressive for Jesus to come riding in on a mighty stallion or to even have borrowed a roman chariot!

It was clear from Jesus’ instructions to his disciples about how to obtain the animal that he was acting very intentionally. But, what was the purpose? Luke understood Jesus acted with preparation and forethought. The gospel author sought to aid us, his readers, in our coming to understand Jesus’ purpose for his entrance into Jerusalem. Luke did this by including an important series of clues in his gospel prior to his account about Palm Sunday. Let’s review some of those clues.

During the dramatic scene of Jesus’ Transfiguration, the author reported in **Luke 9:30-31**, *“Suddenly two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfill God’s Purpose by dying in Jerusalem.”* The underlined portion is one of the important clues Luke provided about why Jesus went to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Jesus was to die in Jerusalem.

Later in chapter 9, Luke provided this strange account of Jesus’ unfulfilled plan to visit a Samaritan village in verses **51-56**, *“As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind and set out on his way to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of him, who went into a village in Samaria to get everything ready for him. But the people there would not receive him, because it was clear that he was on his way to Jerusalem.”* Again, I underlined the clue Luke provided in this report. Jesus was headed to Jerusalem because the time drew near for him to euphemistically “be taken up to heaven”. This brief story about the Samaritan rejection would have been easily understood as a typical example of the animosity between the Jews and Samaritans, except, Luke went on to report, *“When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’”* It should not surprise us that Jesus would not approve of such an expression of hatred and violence, although in our present day, evidently, there are some, who think such talk, ideas, and actions are appropriate. Luke stated in **verses 55-56**, *“Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then Jesus and his disciples went on to another village.”*

We are told later in **Luke 13:31**, *“At that same time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘You must get out of here and go somewhere else, because Herod wants to kill you.’”* I suspect the reason the Pharisees acted in such a way was to try to scare Jesus off. In **verses 32-33**, *“Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell that fox: ‘I am driving out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall finish my work.’ Yet I must be on my way today, tomorrow, and the next day; it is not right for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem.”* In case the Pharisees were being truthful about an imminent threat to Jesus’ life, he would move on during the next few days but not because he was afraid of dying. Instead, he intentionally moved swiftly toward his death in Jerusalem! He understood his purpose was tied very much to dying in Jerusalem. Looking forward to the fulfillment of his purpose, Jesus lovingly spoke of the Holy City in **verses 34-35**,

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets, you stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me! And so your Temple will be abandoned. I assure you that you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord.’” That last underlined portion is a clear reference to Psalm 118, which we used in our Call To Worship and which the crowd shouted during our Palm Sunday Gospel Lectionary Reading. Jesus came to Jerusalem to fulfill his purpose of dying – but why?

Before we answer that “why” it would be helpful for us to note several important details about the Palm Sunday event. First, we need to clearly understand why there was a large crowd to welcome Jesus on that Palm Sunday. Luke told us in **verses 37-38**, ***“When he came near Jerusalem, at the place where the road went down the Mount of Olives, the large crowd of his disciples began to thank God and praise Him in loud voices for all the great things that they had seen: ‘God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!’”*** The large crowd gathered, thanked God, praised our Divine Parent, and prayed for “Peace in heaven and glory to God” because of all the great things they had seen Jesus do! **The Gospel of John 12:17-18**, gave a very specific example of what Jesus had done as the reason for the great crowd welcoming him, ***“The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had happened. That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle.”*** What the people had seen Jesus do led them to have faith in him being God’s representative, who came to do the Almighty’s work.

Second, the people did not fully understand the meaning of what Jesus as God’s representative was to do – his purpose. Some expected the Messiah to be a great Warrior King – smite the Roman Oppressors as James and John had wanted to smite the Samaritan village, which rejected the Jerusalem bond Jesus. Luke reported Jesus instructed his disciples and they followed his instructions in **verses 31-34**, ***“If someone asks you why you are untying it, tell him that the Master needs it.’ They went on their way and found everything just as Jesus had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, ‘Why are you untying it?’ ‘The Master needs it,’ they answered”***. But why did Jesus need the colt – the donkey?

We get some help in putting the clues together from the **Gospel of John 12:14-16**, ***“Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the Scripture says, ‘Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey.’ His disciples did not understand this at the time; but when Jesus had been raised to glory, they remembered that the Scripture said this about him and that they had done this for him.”*** The reason Jerusalem – the city of Zion should not be afraid is because their King came to prove God’s Forgiveness and Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love has put us in a Right Relationship with our Divine Parent! Jesus’ death on the Cross would become the ultimate demonstration of God’s Agape Love for us – resulting in our receiving the Gift of Faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God and the proof God’s Love overcomes our lack of personal merit, so we are brought into the New Relationship with God and the New Life in Christ by God’s Grace. Thus, there is ***“Peace in heaven and glory to God!”*** Why Did Jesus Ride? He rode in to Jerusalem humbly to show he was truly the Messiah – God’s Person and that through his death we faith God’s Agape Love has made us Right with God – enabling us to be in the New Relationship with God, which will be totally revealed in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God. **Jesus rode to his death to prove God’s Agape Love and Relationship with us! We are saved from our self-destruction and we are enabled and empowered to live the New Life in Christ with God, one another, and with all people – even now!** Amen.