

## “On Entering the Holy City of Jerusalem”

Picture this . . . by Kathryn Matthews Huey.

Pilate has arrived to ‘keep the peace’ in the city during the turbulent time of Passover, when the crowds always get a little unruly. He travels with troops and flags and weapons, all the signs of empire, very impressive, of course. And he rides in on a magnificent warhorse, in case the flags and weapons and troops aren’t a sufficiently intimidating display of power. On the other hand, ‘Jesus--full of a different kind of power---makes his entrance riding a humble donkey, surrounded by his somewhat ragged group of followers, and we know that he doesn’t keep the same kind of peace Pilate and Rome intend, a business-as-usual kind of peace that benefits the empire and the folks on top. No, Jesus brings instead the peace that surpasses understanding, and much of what is about to unfold in the next few days will be the price he pays to bring it.

Picture this . . . by the gospel writer Luke.

### Luke 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethpage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it. “So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were unifying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’ Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

## “At the Gate of Truth”

“Mom,” said my daughter Amy, “Wyatt and Reese just learned a new story in Sunday School about Jesus that they really like. Would you like them to tell you about it? “Oh, I’d love to hear it!” I enthusiastically replied. “Which one is it?” When a blank look fell over both of my grand children’s faces, Amy said, “You know, the one about the time the adults were naughty.” No sooner had the words left her lips than the squealing, jumping up and down, and storytelling began. “I know, I know, let me tell it,” shouted Reese. “Jesus’ disciples were being naughty because they wouldn’t let the children talk with Jesus and give them a hug. So Jesus shook his finger at the adults and said: ‘Let the children come to me! Do not stop them! God loves them too!’

According to the gospel writer Luke, the disciples who lined the road on the day that Jesus entered the Holy city of Jerusalem just one week before his execution by Roman authorities were happy like Wyatt and Reese. As eye-witnesses to Jesus’ great deeds of power done in the Lord’s name they could not contain their joy. They cheered their teacher on and shouted loudly about all the amazing life giving things he had done.

Favorite Jesus stories animated the crowd. “I like the time the dove showed up at his baptism and a heavenly voice said, “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.” “My favorite was the time when he was stronger than the devil.” “Mine is when I caught tons of fish because I put down my net where he told me to.” “I liked it when he healed the man with leprosy.” “Wasn’t it great when he made the blind man see!” “I liked what he said about God forgiving our sins and cancelling debts.” “Mine are his parables that made me think deeper about God. Let’s hear it for the Two Sons; the Lost Sheep; the Lost Coins: the Good Samaritan! Hosanna!” “For me it is his teaching against doing vengeance. Remember what he said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

All of the gospel writers agree that Jesus spent the first day of the last days of his life by riding into the city of Jerusalem on a

donkey colt. Instead of a military steed, he chose an agricultural tool, not a weapon of war; a tractor, not a tank. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem to do battle with the powers of death, as God's Prince of Peace he went through the Gate of Truth disarmed of weapons of death. 'Sin and evil', wrote Joan Chittister, 'are not the same things. Sin has something to do with failing to be the best of what we are trying to be. Evil is malice unleashed against another with intent to do them harm ... Evil has the smell of sulphur to it.' In his scholarly study on the "principalities and powers" in the Bible, Walter Wink concludes that Jesus probably choked on the harmful intent he detected. In *Engaging the Powers* (adapted, p. 7), Wink wrote: First century Jews and Christians perceived in the Roman Empire a demonic spirituality that they called Sammael or satan. But they encountered this spirit in the actual institutional forms of Roman life: military legions, governors, crucifixions, payment of tribute, Roman sacred emblems and standards . . . In the complexities of Jewish religious life, they experienced malice and harm being done in the family, the Law, the sacrificial system, the Temple, kosher food regulations, the distinction between clean and unclean, patriarchy, role expectations for women and children, the class system, the violence, racial and ethnic divisions, the distinction between insider and outsider---in short, every prop of division, domination, supremacy (Wink, p. 110). When Jesus got his first look at what was going on in the Holy city he wept. He saw how fearful souls were caught up in a cycle of violence by watering the seeds of anger, hatred, and violence in their hearts. He knew that they didn't know, that redemptive love, not redemptive violence was God's pathway to peace. In his study on gospel power Wink explained: Human evolution has provided the species with two deeply instinctual responses to violence: flight or fight. Jesus' donkey ride clarified Heaven's third way of nonviolent direct action (ibid, p. 175).

'The nonviolent approach', taught Martin Luther King,' does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor, it first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It

gives them a new self-respect; It calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had . . . Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for human beings to overcome oppression and violence, and to reject revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The goal of nonviolent action is to reveal the truth of a situation and solve conflicts through non-injury.' Many truths and insights for conflict resolution appeared as Jesus did non-violent battle with evil principalities and powers in the city on his way to the cross. In 'Cross Shaped Cosmos,' Jason Byassee noted: The Passion text from Luke should be read in its glorious entirety. And we should take time to point out the signs: Jesus is condemned so that unworthy Barabbas can go free. Simon of Cyrene carries a cross he hadn't planned on carrying for a Christ he hadn't planned on meeting. "He saved others; let him save himself," they say in mockery while the world is being saved by the one who won't save himself. And a man dying beside him, and a Roman centurion, recognize what the world's greatest legal system (Rome) and God's own chosen people mostly cannot see---that this one can save from death. There is a saying attributed to St. Augustine: "Do not despair; one thief was saved. Do not presume; one thief was lost." This is a lot for the preacher—and parish—to hold in her hands, like Joseph of Arimathea once held the dead body of Christ in his. But in the economy of this God, dead things are constantly springing forth with life.

"Grammy," said Wyatt. "What's your favorite Jesus story?" "Ah, let me think," I said patting my heart to find its deepest longing. "Ooo! Ooo! I know, I know!" I squealed. "It's the one when the Pharisees were naughty because they told Jesus to tell his friends to stop cheering for him. So Jesus shook his finger at them and said: 'No I won't! They are the good guys. They want to learn how to build people up, not tear people down. Then the donkey hee-hawed, the stones jumped up and sang, and the friends of Jesus Yoo-hoo'd even louder.

### Prayer

Gentle Spirit, tell me the stories of Jesus, I love to hear. Things I would ask him to tell me if he were here . . . Amen.