

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking "Who is this!" the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee"

Prayer. Hosanna! we cry. Blessed is Jesus who comes with the power of God's Redeeming Love. Strengthen our faith that we might die to violence once and for all. Amen.

"Jesus, the Prophet from Nazareth"



"They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them."

Matthew 21:7

In his portrayal of the event, Matthew set the stage for battle against "principalities and powers" that had taken systemic hold among the people and had infected good hearts. In *Engaging the Powers* (adapted, p. 7), Biblical Scholar 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 domination, division, supremacy. The early church probably viewed "principalities and powers" in this way:

The powers are good.

The powers are fallen.

The powers must be redeemed.

(Wink, p. 110)

The powers are good. In his reflection on this scripture, Rev. Samuel wrote: "Today we mark the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem . . . riding on a donkey. He comes not as a military conqueror riding on a stallion, but as a humble servant riding on a donkey. But Jesus didn't just ride on a donkey; Jesus rode on a donkey and a colt. He rode not just on a beast of service, but also on its young, weak, vulnerable offspring. The Gospel emphasizes that Jesus rode the donkey and its colt into Jerusalem. He was not only making a statement about his humility, he was also making a statement about his vulnerability. Can there be any true humility without a true realization of weakness? Is it possible to really be humble and at the same time be shielded from hurt. . . pain . . . rejection? Jesus enters the world through the vulnerability of a baby . . . and Jesus prepares to end his earthly sojourn by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and on a young, tender colt. In counseling, people seek someone who sees and understands the visceral pain of their perplexities and dilemmas. In relationships, intimacy can only be reached through a common let down of defenses and a common openness of transparency. In politics, we are always searching for the candidate who is straightforward enough to identify with our deep-seated struggles and anxieties. The humility of Jesus is not a lofty, singular virtue. It connects all of us who labor with the stresses and strains of everyday life. And it tells us that our power is not in camouflaging our weaknesses, but in recognizing our weaknesses, and acknowledging the common places where we hurt together. There is only one who can heal. It is the one who has been wounded.

The powers are fallen. The colt and donkey give us some clues into Jesus' battle with fallen powers. Unlike the horse, a military steed which was used as a weapon of war, the donkey was a beast of peace, an agricultural tool, a tractor, not a tank. The colt had never been ridden before. He symbolized Jesus' new, sacred mission of nonviolence. Martin Luther King wrote: 'Nonviolence 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 man to overcome oppression and violence, and to reject revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation for such method is love. The goal of nonviolent action is to reveal the truth of a situation and solve conflicts through non-injury. In his study on "principalities and powers" Walter Wink suggests that one of the powers that needed disarming for Love's Third Way to break our human cycle of violence is our faith in redemptive violence. This myth is as old as human history and its precepts are universally known: 1) Violence is bad only if the bad guys do it. If the good guys do it, then it's O.K. 2) Fight fire with fire, 3) Kill the enemy before he kills you. (ibid)

The powers must be redeemed. 'When the rest of humanity is putting their trust in the myth of redemptive violence', wrote Barbara Brown Taylor, 'Jesus hangs on the cross, stubbornly refusing to fight at all. He has taken into himself all the violence flung against him and he will not give it back. Abused, he will not abuse. Condemned, he will not condemn. Abandoned, he remains faithful. By choosing to die rather than to retaliate, he disarms the bomb of redemptive violence, wrapping himself around it to protect the rest of us from it. It kills him in the process, but that is how we know he won. The violence stopped with him. It caused his death, but it got none of his life. His life belonged to God, who sent him to show us another way to live. Day by day, Christ invites us to follow him--the one who would not resort to violence, not even to save his own life--the one who fought back by refusing to fight back and who replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of indestructible love. Here, then is another way to redeem the world: not by killing off the troublemakers but by dying to violence once and for all. Because he did, we can. He died to show us how. We live to show him we got the message.' (The Myth of Redemptive Violence, p. 109)