

## Through the Gates

**Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Phil 2:1-11**

Everybody loves a parade. In a parade, the heroes of the world are exalted and all the people gather round to cheer them on.

You can learn a lot about a society by watching its parades.

In the royal procession of a King, the hopes of the people are held aloft on the shoulders of the great leader who passes by in purple splendor.

In a military parade, the heroes of war march by to display their strength and courage, and to be cheered on by their countrymen whose horns they fight to protect.

Or, these days, in a country that spends so much of its resources on recreation and leisure, we have parades on the day of a big football game in preparation for that hallowed contest on the gridiron.

Or there's the Macy's Day parade, orchestrated by the New York merchandisers to celebrate the official beginning of the holiday shopping season. They know that parades make people feel happy and hopeful .... and hopeful people spend more money.

You can learn a lot about a society by watching its parades.

Today we have gathered together as a society of sorts, a body of people who gather together under a common name .... and we have had a parade. We have remembered that march through the streets of Jerusalem. And at the end of our parade we have passed through the gates into the sanctuary where we will worship our Exalted One, the One on whom our hopes rest, the One on whom rest the hopes of all who join with us today in the passion of this parade.

And you can learn a lot about our society by watching our parade. At first appearance it may be like any other parade, with the people cheering and waving their palms, giving shouts of adoration to the sovereign who rides through the city on his royal mount. But a closer look reveals something crucially different. Our King does not enter the city riding atop a mighty war-horse...instead he is mounted on a humble and noticeably inglorious animal. He is riding on a donkey. His name is Jesus. He is the son of a carpenter, and he comes into town with a straggling band of outcasts following behind him who call him the Son of a King.

And while it is a very large crowd that cheers Jesus on, it is certainly not the whole city that comes out to witness his entrance. In fact it was the inhabitants of this city that were so greatly troubled along with their King Herrod when Jesus was born in Bethlehem not many years ago. Many of Jerusalem's prominent and powerful citizens perceive him to be a threat.

And he is a threat because when the crowds shout "*Hosanna to the Son of David*" they are making a political statement. Their words reveal a conflict of two kingdoms. One represented by the powerful rulers of the city, and the other, by this humble Nazorean, riding in from the outskirts of town...on a donkey.

And we who shout with them ...we who feel compelled to exalt this humble one with our words...we must decide whether we are willing to enter that conflict, whether we are willing

to turn away from the power that exalts itself

and

turn toward the power revealed in this one who humbles himself,

Are we willing to follow him even after the parade is over,  
and after the crowd's approval turns sour, and their palms are cast aside  
and exchanged for fists, waving in the air as they shout,  
"Crucify him!"?

Are we willing to take our humility as far as Jesus took his? Are we ready to take on the same mind that was in  
Jesus....

*"who though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality -with God as something to be grasped..."*

Are we willing to be obedient to God's calling even when it means giving up what is rightfully ours....  
perhaps...

...giving up a comfortable life  
...forgoing the full and unfettered use of our money, rightfully earned  
...a life of pleasure, unburdened by the plight of the poor and the outcast.

Are we ready, as Jesus was,  
To take on the form of a slave,  
To humble ourselves, and serve others  
To become obedient to God, even if it makes us unpopular with the crowd

Not everybody loves this parade. Not everyone chooses to follow along in this procession. It seems odd to  
the world

That taking on an attitude of humility should be the way to glory.  
That the way to salvation and new life is to be submersed into the waters of the font,  
And to die with One who is rejected by the world.

But this is the mystery of our parade. In the obedience of this Jesus...*who was obedient to the point of  
death, even death on a cross...*we find our way into the presence of God. This Jesus is the gate through which we  
must pass to enter the kingdom of heaven. In his humble obedience is our salvation.

*"This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it."*

Are you weak, and broken down by life.  
You may enter through this gate.

Are you ashamed of your past, and the stains that still cover you.  
You may enter through this gate.

Are you powerless to change the painful circumstances in which you live.  
You may enter through this gate.

Are you frightened by the evil that rages in the darkness of the world.  
You may enter through this gate.

Those who humble themselves, who bend the knee, and who confess the name of this Jesus and are willing to carry the cross and die with him, they will enter through this gate. But when they do it is not death that they will find on the other side.

For the One who humbled himself, God has highly exalted, and God

*gave him the name that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,*

*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

So come walk with Jesus, along the dusty streets of Jerusalem....  
into the temple and into confrontation....

to the table with his disciples to break bread for the last time....

into Gethsemane to pray.... into the courts of the High Priest

to stand before Pilate...

and to hear the people shout "Let him be crucified"...

and at last, out of the city, to the Place of the Skull,

where the cross awaits,

This most humble gate through which we must pass.

Come with Jesus there.... Because on the other side of the gate there is thanksgiving.  
Those who pass through it will shout,

*"I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation."*