

# “Welcoming Party”

A reflection for Palm Sunday

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John 1.9-13; Matthew 20.29-21.17

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Please read [MATTHEW 20.29-21.17](#)

He was coming into our city. Who would welcome him? He has come into our *kosmos*. Who welcomes him now?

*Kosmos* is the Greek word for “world.” That’s how it’s translated into English in our Bibles. I like to keep the word “*kosmos*.” We know the word. Still, it is slightly unfamiliar. Using it prods us away from assuming we’ve got the world figured out.

*Kosmos* is what things are, and the way things work—in us, and around us, and among us. The *kosmos* is God-made. The *kosmos* is human-damaged. So it needs to be set-right, rescued and redeemed, restored and re-made.

We set out to do this, to make things right. We do our best. We do our worst. Some things get better. Other things worse. We build things up. Things fall apart. Nothing holds for long.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe we give up. We say, “The way it is, is the way it will always be.” We who can hunker down behind borders and barricades, find places to hide-out and shut out the rest.

The most who can’t, cry out, “*How long, O Lord!*”

The Saviour is coming. Who will welcome him?

*The true Light that shines on all people  
was coming into the kosmos.  
The Light was in the kosmos,  
and the kosmos came into being through the Light,  
but the kosmos didn't recognize the Light.  
The Light came to his own,  
and his own didn't welcome him.  
But those who did welcome him,  
those who believed in his name,  
he gave them the right to become God's children,  
born not from blood nor from human desire or passion,*

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<sup>1</sup> W. B. Yeats' poem [The Second Coming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Second_Coming_(poem)) includes the line, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Second\\_Coming\\_\(poem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Second_Coming_(poem))

*but born from God.*<sup>2</sup>

II

Jesus isn't the first and he won't be the last conquering king to ride into the Holy City. Starting with King David himself, Jerusalem has been taken many, many times. It has always been contested and fought over. (You would think God would have chosen a more peaceful place to, in a sense, "pitch his tent.")

Alexander the Great conquered from Greece to India. He never lost a battle. Jerusalem, though, he did not defeat. No, they opened the doors wide and let him ride in. The civic fathers went out to greet him, rolled out the red carpet, and processed "the Great" into the city, into the Temple even.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus plans his campaign as carefully as any general. He leads his forces up the steep, twisted, rocky climb from Jericho.

They make camp in Bethany. Bethany was known as a place where the poor and sick were cared for. Things like leprosy made the sufferer unfit to be anywhere close to Jerusalem. Bethany is just far enough away.<sup>4</sup> It is close enough that, when the time comes, Jesus can strike quickly into the city.

The Mount of Olives rises before them. Jesus knows what he is doing as he walks up to Bethpage at the top (their advanced staging area). The prophet Zechariah foretold that, when the city had been taken over, pillaged and ravaged, the Lord God himself would stand on the Mount of Olives to take the city back. From the Mount, Jesus rides down.

III

Now it's weird. He's on a donkey, with her colt trailing behind.

Donkeys are slow and stubborn. Not the war horse of the mighty, donkeys are the pack animals of the poor. There is nothing inspiring about a donkey. Who ever conquered anything riding a donkey?

Speaking of weird . . . I didn't want to say anything before, for fear of sounding judgey. But this army Jesus is leading, it looks like a bunch of scraps he's picked up along the way. Some can barely walk. Instead of spears, they're carrying crutches. Riding stretchers rather than chariots. Their uniforms are rags. A couple over there, the ones with begging bowls, are blinking like they've never seen daylight before. Running sores. Missing limbs. For sure there are lepers in there. The only thing this rabble could

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<sup>2</sup> I've adapted the CEB translation.

<sup>3</sup> [www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1120-alexander-the-great](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1120-alexander-the-great)

<sup>4</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethany#Bethany\\_and\\_care\\_of\\_the\\_poor\\_and\\_sick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethany#Bethany_and_care_of_the_poor_and_sick)

capture is more disease. It's not an army. It's a mob.

Just as Jesus planned it.

For a red carpet, they use the clothes off their backs. For banners, they strip leaves from trees.

*"God save us!"* they're calling out! *"God bless the one who comes in the Lord's name! God, save from bottom to top!"*

Listen, these aren't battle cries of victory. They are beaten cries for help!

*God save the Son of David! God save our gracious King!* (But you know the story. God won't. The King won't even save himself. On the other side of the city, awaits a cross.)

Not for the first or last time, the city shakes at Jesus. *"Who is this? What's with him?"*<sup>5</sup>

Very soon, merchants are yelling and tripping over each other to get out of the way. Jesus sends coins flying after doves. He is rarely good for the economy.

For now, though, this mob fills the sanctuary. What a mess . . . of healing, and curing, and celebration. New life all around. Jesus in the middle of it all, giving himself away for free. Children, not quiet in church, singing out, prepared for praising God.

The preachers, pastors, and ministers, they are angry. None of this is in the order of service!

#### IV

Jesus' entry into the city feels like a parody, a parody he was doing on purpose. You have to laugh at the donkey. What kind of conquest is this?

Jesus launched an invasion, and it turned into a party. One where all the wrong sort, the most unlikely and un-liked, were welcome. A feast, with *hosanna* on the menu. Salvation!

But what changed?

Soon things were cleaned up, the mob cleaned out, and things returned to normal. The marketplace was back to posting record profits.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew uses the verb *seió*, which means "to shake." From it we get words like "seismic." Later when Jesus died, the shaking returned (27:51), and again when he resurrected (28:2-4). Earlier, at the news of Jesus' birth, the city trembled too (2:3).

Alexander the Great died young. He was just 32. His long funeral procession was magnificent. Alexander had never lost once.

Jesus died at about the same age. His grave was a borrowed tomb. By then his welcome party, less than a week before, was long-forgotten. All he'd conquered was a mob of misfits. And a donkey.

If you are desperate for someone to rescue you, who would you welcome? The likes of Alexander? Or Jesus? Honestly.

Who does our *kosmos* welcome?

*The Light was in the kosmos,  
and the kosmos came into being through the Light,  
but the kosmos didn't recognize the Light.  
The Light came to his own,  
and his own didn't welcome him.*

But those who do welcome him, who trust in who he is . . . he makes them God's children, born from God.

Thanks be to God.