

**Isaiah 42:1-4. ¹“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;**

**I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.**

**²He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.**

**³A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.**

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

**⁴he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.**

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

Does this passage seem a little out of place to you, on a day like today? It's Palm Sunday, it's the day that we grab one of those branches and the little children shout and sing. Hosanna, loud Hosanna! It's a day of jubilant praise! It's a day that we raise our voices in triumphant songs as the organ cranks out with majestic might. Ride on ride on in majesty! Shouting and crying out go hand in hand on Palm Sunday.

In the midst of all this excitement, and this commotion, this great big hubbub of activity and noise of Palm Sunday, we pull back the branches and we see our Savior is coming into Jerusalem and he is riding on a donkey. The one exalted and praised, is to be praised for his humility. For his humility is our hope. God himself emptied himself of the full glory and the praise and the pomp and prestige that was due him and he rides into Jerusalem as our servant who goes to suffer, who goes to take on the punishment that our sins deserve. Look at this makeshift parade and see this royal yet gentle one, who humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross for lowly sinners like us.

In a certain sense, Palm Sunday might seem a bit less important than the rest of this Holy Week. We meet on Palm Sunday, in part, because well it's Sunday and that's the day that we always meet. And unlike the rest of these high holy days, there is no specific teaching or flashy miracle or redemptive act that takes place. Jesus does not bestow his disciples with a lengthy lesson as he does in the upper room, he does not institute a lasting sacrament, nor does he shed his blood for our sins on this day. But Palm Sunday is a day that is ripe with symbolism as it displays a telling picture of who our Savior is and what he came to do. He comes in humility and gentleness to save sinners, and therefore, as sinners redeemed and saved by Jesus we exalt him and praise his name.

In life, there are typically two ways to be exalted and lifted up. There are those who beg for the attention, even demand that people would respect and honor them. And so they brandish their credentials or produce their own hype so that the masses remember how

important they are and how they should respond with shouts of acclamation. Then there are those who simply with their presence command respect and praise, as others simply witness who they genuinely are and what they are able to do. Jesus shows up to enter into Jerusalem and steps forward and the praise effortlessly follows. On Palm Sunday, we are reminded of who our Jesus is and how with minimal effort of his own, he elicits praise as he comes forward to be our humble Savior. Simply because of who is and what he has come to do, praise has to follow.

Notice there are no drums or horns, bells or whistles, or an elaborate procession that takes weeks to plan. There isn't an order given out to his disciples to prepare a parade and round up the people and tell them what to say, and why they should shout in Jesus' honor. No, the only order Jesus gives is that he tells his disciples to find a borrowed donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. Thus, Jesus comes forward in humility and the people spontaneously spread their cloaks on the road and cut down branches, and sing his praise. Jesus himself seems to make little noise as he rides into Jerusalem, only to say that this rejoicing must happen. He comes in humility, likely side-saddled on this young beast that was chosen for a specific purpose. In fulfillment of scripture, he comes on a donkey to signify that he was a humble ruler, a different kind of King, a servant King, who brings peace.

In ancient times, kings like David would in fact ride on donkeys, but they did so to announce that every enemy had been defeated and every threat put down. This was a symbolic expression that a warhorse was no longer needed because there was peace. Jesus does not come on a warhorse to overthrow the Romans (as some had hoped), but he comes to bring peace with God through his death and resurrection. He comes to surrender his very life and yet in his surrender he knows he will win a triumphant victory for us. The evil of sin and death and hell will be crushed and defanged and put down by his coming. He comes to labor and die for the sins of the whole world and to reconcile us to God. He comes in humility to bring us peace. Thus we lowly sinners, hopeless without him, have real and lasting hope for the mighty one has humbled himself to save us.

He comes as the mighty one who is also gentle. He comes as the one promised and pictured as a King, who is also a servant. The prophet Zechariah speaks of the *King who comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey* (Zechariah 9:9). As Isaiah speaks of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 42, he speaks of *the servant* of the Lord. This is the one whom God had chosen. He bears the very Spirit of God, and he will bring justice to the nations. That description touts his impressive resume and credentials. It reminds us that God himself is pleased with him. Therefore, the whole world - God's people and all the distant islands alike - should listen to this servant. Thus, his reputation proceeds him, so to speak. He does not need to toot his own horn or campaign broadly to get the people's attention. He is the chosen one of God sent to bring justice to the nations.

Yet the next few lines are crucial as they remind us of his essential character, which is humility. It is the kind of humility that we would see on Palm Sunday, the kind of humility and gentleness that we would see as Jesus dealt with sinners on earth as *the servant* of the

Lord. The Messiah comes near, and we are told, *a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out*. He comes as the one who would bring justice and make things right. He comes as the chosen holy one of God, but as he comes near to sinners broken by sin and its curse he is notably and wonderfully gentle.

The servant of the living God comes near, and that almighty and powerful God is gentle and gracious with sinners who deserve his wrath. For example, remember how Jesus, this servant of the Lord, speaks to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a rich tax collector, who had cheated and stolen from his fellow countrymen. Now Zacchaeus was troubled enough by his sin that he climbed a tree in his fancy clothes to catch just a glimpse of Jesus. And how did Jesus speak to him? With gentleness and warmth and compassion and grace. “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:3). As they visit, they talk about sin and grace, and grace abounds. Joy overwhelms his guilt and Zacchaeus is made new. *A bruised reed he does not break*. Instead, he graciously and gently comes near to bind up the broken-hearted. He comes near to redeem and ever so gently restore and make wondrously new. He comes near to this lowly sinner and sin is addressed and then the Lord of all bespeaks the sinner righteous because of the righteousness and salvation that Jesus freely gives. The sinner’s sins are forgiven, and a new life is firmly rooted and grows with strength, for that gentle word of forgiveness was spoken by the mighty, yet gentle, servant of the Lord.

With humility and gentleness, Jesus deals with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and others shunned for their sins. He makes a habit of coming near to help and heal those suffering under the weight of sin’s guilt and its curse. He comes near and deals with the sinner with humility and he does what other important men of his time would never do. He has compassion on the outsider, the outcast, the sinner. Look at Jesus and see how he not only talks with the teachers and society’s elite, he comes near to *the others*. He talks with women - some of them were even Gentiles - he gives of his time to children, he spends time preaching to the lowly and despised, so that all kinds of people would hear his saving Word. Those convicted by their sin are lifted up and restored by the servant of the Lord, who is their only hope for salvation.

Palm Sunday sets the theme of humility as a central theme for Jesus’ whole life, and for the rest of the holy week. Thus, it’s no real surprise that while suffering on the cross, he has that unforgettable dialogue with a criminal. This criminal has seen the error of his ways. He understands that he is getting what his deeds deserve and yet by God’s gift of faith, he recognizes how magnificent and special Jesus really is, and so he begs of Jesus. *“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* And Jesus responds with trademark tenderness and lavish grace. *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* The law had done its work and now it was time for the gospel to shine. Therefore, there is no mention of this man’s rightful shame and how this criminal should have cleaned up his act long ago. Instead, with tenderness, with gentleness, he deals with those that fall far short of his glory and who are aware of their sin. **³A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.**

He comes in humility to lift up the lowly, thus, as lowly sinners we praise him. As sinners, we ought to know the reality of sin. Our daily lives prove day after day that we too have fallen short of God’s glory. If that’s not enough, the bible makes it clear that we are not

only bruised and broken because of sin we are as good as dead. Thus, we tremble as the servant of the Lord comes to bring justice, and make no mistake about it, God still demands payment for sin. Our conscience reminds us all, that we are all accountable to a just and holy God. And since God sends his servant to establish justice on the earth, what we deserve is to have this servant of God come and cleanse us from the presence of God. He should come and trample over us and break us off from God and from hope. He should toss us aside and throw us into the flames for every one of the sins that we committed and how we broke God's sacred laws. And yet grace abounds, and this servant does not come to snuff us out and leave us in the darkness without hope. On the contrary, the servant of God comes near with gentleness and humility. Instead of being driven from the presence of God with terror and fear he draws us in with his gentleness and humility. And then he kindles in us a faith that cries out with thanksgiving and praise.

"Hosanna," we cry, "save us!" And in his kindness he does. He comes. He draws us near with his humility and gives us a sure and certain hope. Be drawn to the one who comes in gentleness and humility having salvation. "Rejoice, O Daughter of Jerusalem". Rejoice you bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. Rejoice for his humility is so intertwined with our hope.

But don't confuse humility with some sort of lack of zeal or conviction. He comes draped in humility, in the weakness of our flesh, and on this humble beast, but **4he will not falter or be discouraged**. He is adorned with a steely determination, yet gentleness of heart. He comes. He goes to the cross. He takes on the punishment that our sins deserve.

Later on, in the book of Isaiah, the prophet would show us just how far this suffering servant was willing to go to save sinners. ***He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed (Isaiah 53:5)***. 700 years before Christ would come, note how the prophet writes. He writes as if it had already happened. Note how Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem. On a donkey, as if peace had already been procured. The Lord had made a promise and it was therefore as good as done. The Lord God would uphold his servant through this awful ordeal for this was the plan he was pleased to fulfill for you. He comes in humility, and he will save us.

On this day of shouts and cries, and triumphant tunes, fix your eyes on the one who rides in humility for you. Stand in awe of his gentle humility that provides us with jubilant and victorious hope. **3A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out... He will not falter or be discouraged**. The servant will carry out the Father's task for lowly sinners like us. *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. Blessed is the servant of the LORD, who comes in humility to lift us up and save us! Rejoice, for he comes gentle and having salvation. May sinners from all the nations put their hope in our humble and triumphant King! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.