



We hope beyond hope that many public activities will be returning to somewhat normal as this calendar year continues to progress, including the beloved county fairs throughout our nation. For young people, fairs are not just about the animal life that they may not get to see otherwise, or even the elephant ears and other deep-fried foods; they are also about the amusing rides they will wait for hours on end to experience. Now, one I never took advantage of was always near the front corner of our county fair, and it was the pony ride: not the mechanical ones you put quarters in at the front of a store; no, actual real-life ponies that children would line up forever to have a chance at saddling up for, even if just for a minute or so.

However, even though I never jumped on one myself there, I always noticed the excitement level was not just about being lifted up to the young horse's back. Instead, it was about the child's opportunity to see the crowd around the ride, including the chance to see the joy and excitement on their own family's faces. It had a way of making them feel special, even if just for a minute or so, but that extraordinary rush of the most exuberant happiness had a way of carrying them on an emotional height for the rest of the entire day and night.

So, I wonder if there is something about that most precious experience for young people that can actually help us realize something else about this Palm Sunday. Yes, it is widely accepted that Jesus gets on a donkey (which I know is different from a pony, but nevertheless...), the King of Kings jumps onto the animal to fulfill the prophecy from Zechariah that says, "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey..." (9:9). All well and good, but I wonder if still, there is something more to it: a compassionate ministry component that simply cannot be overlooked as we enter this holiest week.

No, Jesus is not interested on giving his disciples marching orders to find the largest chariot around Jerusalem, to instill a sense of brute intimidating force being the Son of God and all. However, Jesus still wants a little bit of elevation off the ground. So, I wonder if our Lord asks his disciples to get the donkey not just to fulfill a prophecy from centuries before, but for just enough precious height to better see the crowd; to make the most heart-felt eye contact with the ones who are so desperate for any sense of hope. I wonder if he wants a little bit of holy elevation for the crowds of all ages to see his own face: the face of the one who is about to bring heaven to earth all the more.

I wonder if Jesus wants to look at these people, knowing full well they are about to turn on him soon enough: that their shouts will descend from "Hosanna!"s to "Crucify him!"s, and still look at those human faces with a stubborn propensity towards self-preservation, and insist on guiding the donkey forward, nevertheless. I wonder if he wants to look into their eyes, and say, "No matter what you are about to do to me this week, you are still worth all of it!" There has gotta be something more to this Palm Sunday than fulfilling prophecy. There has gotta be a holy compassionate love component that sets our Lord reeling in a joyous spiritual high that carries him all the way to a cross and beyond.

Come to think of it, that county fair ride was not setup to take the children on any straight direction ahead of them. Instead, the ponies took them in a circle however many laps around, as they got to see and hear the shouts of support and encouragement from their family and complete strangers, for that matter, around them. And perhaps, that is what this Holy Week ends up being about, after all: setting up a never ending surrounding of the staunchest support and encouragement from our Lord and Savior, that not even death could stop from circling around us for eternity. Jesus did not get on his animal to better see or hear support and encouragement from the crowd, as if to gauge exactly how many shout “Hosanna!” or just how passionately they yell “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” No, Jesus gets on the donkey to give the crowd a sense of the most heart-warming support for all the difficulties they endure in their life. Jesus gets to that holy elevation to encourage the masses that they are indeed worth the cross ahead, to show just how much they are loved, no matter what.

It’s as if he could still look into *our* eyes and insist that we are worth being surrounded with all the divine support and encouragement that heaven has to offer, and that nothing that we ever do will make that holy circle of the most loving compassion ever come apart from us. And for that Greatest News of all brought to life, yet again, this Holy Week, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!