

## 2019 Palm: The Gospel of Mistakes

The word “gospel” generally refers to the teachings of Jesus. It can also mean the undeniable truth. We often refer to the first four books of the New Testament as the Gospels, and put Gospel in front of the author: such as the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of John. These books are about the teachings and activities portrayed and attributed to the historic Jesus figure.

Several years ago, before I came to minister here at ULV, I was invited to lead the Thursday 11am Silent Unity prayer service that fell just before Palm Sunday. As I read the story of Jesus’ trip into Jerusalem at the festival of Passover, I noticed something I thought was odd. Jesus directed the disciples to bring a young, untried donkey colt to him to ride. The accounts of all four gospels are unanimous on this point. What was Jesus **thinking**? A little guy who has never been ridden is your choice to ride through a crowd?

Now there are two historical items we might want to consider as we reflect on this element of Palm Sunday. First, Jerusalem was filled with Roman soldiers, called in to keep peace during Passover. I guess the Jewish people got a little restless and unruly during holidays so the troops were called in. Roman soldiers rode horses and there were activities in other parts of town where the horses were featured. Jesus might have been motivated to set himself apart from the symbol of rulers of the material world. Also, the Jewish texts prophesized the messiah would come on a donkey. There are several places in the gospels where the story might be a little contrived to fit ancient predictions about the messiah. In Unity, we understand the Bible to contain another level of meaning beyond the literal or even historical. So what is the message about Jesus riding a donkey colt into Jerusalem as the arc of his story is about to reach its conclusion?

Metaphysically, Jesus represents the Christ of our being—the divine essence we are before, during and after our physical incarnation. The Christ is revealing itself as the clash of old and new beliefs is playing out a struggle in the material world. Roman and Greek gods on little alters in most houses; the Hebrew people trying to keep their identity and stamp out the little gods; and then news of this new guy, performing miracles and talking about love God and your neighbor. It was a lot to handle!

So what about the donkey colt? What did it represent? Animals typically represent our animal nature—that sense driven part of our humanity. The focus is in our body and our choice of actions is informed more by instinct, adrenalin, emotions and subconscious beliefs about how the world works. Some animals, like sheep, represent when our animal nature calls on emotions like love and peace to inform our choices. What about donkeys? Young, untrained and untried donkeys? What do we know about them? Typically we think of donkeys as having characteristics of being stubborn, willful and obstinate. I'm not judging the donkeys and I read some interesting articles about how we get to interpreting their behavior that way—but that is generally how we think of donkeys.

Charles Fillmore doesn't really address the metaphysics of donkeys in any of his dictionary works. However, in speaking about Jerusalem in the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* he has this: "Jesus riding out from near Bethphage into Jerusalem signifies progressive unfoldment, the fulfillment of the time when the spiritual I AM takes control and lifts all the animal forces of man into the spiritual plane of mastery, purity, and peace." So he says this ride into Jerusalem is about our spiritual journey and unfolding. Jesus wasn't forced to ride a donkey but he **chose** the donkey.

I believe this represents an essential element of the "good news" of the gospel. Traditionally many speak of the "good news" as being about salvation. Unity doesn't teach that we need saving but teaches that the good news is acknowledging and claiming the divinity within us. I believe the element of the untried, untrained donkey proclaims that we don't have to be perfect to claim our divinity. We don't have to prove ourselves **worthy** of the divine nature which is our inheritance from the moment we are created in the image and likeness of God. This humanity that carries our divinity into the world; this incarnation of the divine in the world of duality is anticipated to make choices that get judged as "mistakes" *and it doesn't matter*. Mistakes are not a barrier to claiming and expressing our divine nature. Living into a greater fullness of our divinity is our spiritual journey and the message Jesus conveyed to me in that story is that the divine chooses us unconditionally anticipating it might be a bumpy ride.

Let's let that idea sink in a bit. We are spiritual beings having a human experience. That human experience is our journey in the manifest world to acknowledge and live from our divine nature.

The journey is how we discover more and more of our divinity and begin to master how to use our spiritual power. The journey is life, day by day. Rain and shine, ups and downs. The message spoken to me those years ago is also that our journey is not to reach a point where we are given our divinity or earn our divinity through training but that *it is ours from the beginning*. Nothing we can do on the journey takes away the essence of the Christ nature, the spiritual I AM within us.

This message is a HUGE shift from the Old Testament and traditions of obedience and worthiness. In the Old Testament, every time something bad happened to the Hebrew people it was blamed on disobedience. There is no getting around the idea that there are consequences for our choices. But for me, the little donkey stands for the idea that choices that make me uncomfortable may be part of the journey but they don't indicate that I am less than divine in essence.

And the gospels are filled with evidence that this was part of the good news Jesus proclaimed. Jesus hung out with people who made mistakes or what we call mistakes in our duality thinking. Jesus hung out with people deemed "losers" in his time. And not once did he exclude them or tell them they were out of the circle of Oneness. However, he did have some advice for them.

Remember the woman who had committed adultery and was about to be stoned by the crowd? Jesus intervened. And the crowd tested him. They thought either he was going to have to say adultery was ok or he was going to have to say it was ok to stone her. Well neither of those is in alignment with living from our higher self. So what did Jesus say? First he addresses judging others. "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Well that dispersed the crowd. But what about the woman committing adultery? Was that okay? In John, chapter 8 Jesus is alleged to have advised her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." We get second chances. Most of us are on the second millionth chance on some issue or another. But we are **not ever** excluded from the opportunity to live more fully into our divinity.

The gospels of Mark and Luke tell an interesting story about Jesus healing a man who was paralyzed. The house where Jesus was teaching was so crowded the friends of the man could not get him in. So they climbed up and cut a hole in the roof and lowered the man down to where Jesus was. According to Mark: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,

‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” Well then some scribes who were there got excited about Jesus saying sins were forgiven. But Jesus responds to them: “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’” This healing story is another description of a second chance. Some error thoughts had taken control in this man’s life, producing an adverse condition. Unity teaches that sins are those error thoughts and choices out of alignment with living from our divinity. We have missed the mark. Jesus is saying first, ok, by coming here believing there is more available to you, you are on the right path. So you have a second chance to live from the new truth you are discovering about yourself. Finally, I believe Jesus is saying; in that second chance you are going to have to take action and do better. “Stand up and take your mat and walk”. Or as my grandpa would advise, “You’re gonna hafta straighten up and fly right.” Or as Dr. Maya Angelou would advise, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

Isn’t it good news that the Universe is designed in a way that anticipates our struggles and doesn’t disqualify us from our place in the divine web of oneness based on our struggle? On a literal level, we can be as contrary as a donkey and still claim the Christ as our true nature. We all carry the I AM in our very dna. How many of us kind of need to hear that once in a while? Don’t we want to be reminded that we are *more than our past* and we are *more than our judgments* of ourselves and judgments we hear from others? Who doesn’t think this is good news?

Whether Jesus was working with lepers cast out from society or tax collectors with a history of cheating or a man possessed by demons or an adulterer, there is no worthiness test. There is no condemnation or judgment of where they currently are on their spiritual journey. Jesus was pretty consistent. Every one of them has the opportunity to claim their divinity and chart a new course. The Prodigal Son, Zachheus the tax collector and Legions. Inherent in our second chance is both the idea the divine nature is already within and the idea living from it is now our choice. Choices we have made in the past do not limit us from making new choices and claiming our divine inheritance.

We are all on the journey of our spiritual unfoldment and we are all divine. The lowly donkey colt proudly carried the spiritual leader through the crowd without incident. Spirit believes in the possibilities already within us.

Let’s celebrate the good news!