

“Who Is This?”

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11;
Matthew 25:1-11

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

I would like to invite you to think about that day so many years ago when Jesus and his disciples had gathered and had begun that journey into Jerusalem, with Jesus sitting on a donkey. I want to think about a couple of young men who might have been there that day. One is a young guy named Yaakov, who is coming and just seeing the crowd and just beginning to hear what's happening. He's coming to Jerusalem to be at the Passover. He hasn't been there for a few years. He's a shepherd in the hills of Galilee, but this year he's made the journey to Jerusalem to do Passover in Jerusalem.

The other is his friend, Ephraim, who is part of the crowd. And so as Yaakov comes and sees the crowd, he hears the rejoicing, and he comes closer and finds that he has a friend in the crowd, Ephraim.

He gets Ephraim's attention and says, “Ephraim, what's happening here?”

Ephraim says, “Don't you know? The prophet from Galilee is coming into Jerusalem. He's coming, and we're celebrating.”

Yaakov is amazed. He looks around and what he saw initially as great joy seemed to have a little edge on it. It's more of a desperate hope that he hears out of this crowd. He wonders what's going on. Ephraim says, “We have a new king coming in. He's going to be the new King David. He's going to come and change everything. He's going to drive the Romans out.”

Yaakov wonders about this description. He sees Jesus riding toward them and he thinks, that's the man I saw on that Galilean hillside. I remember that day. He was sitting on the hillside. As we listened, he started talking about what it really means to be blessed. He talked about – and it's still confusing to me – he was talking about what it was to be poor of spirit, to really mourn, to be humble, to be merciful, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to have an innocence and a purity about us, to be peacemakers, and how to endure when the world doesn't appreciate when we pay attention to his teachings. Is this the same man riding on a donkey? The same man Ephraim is telling me now is going to be king? I think he said in the midst of that sermon on the hillside that we should love our enemies.

“What do you think, Ephraim? Should we love our enemies?”

“I think you're talking crazy. We need someone who's going to come in and throw the Romans out, to be the new King David on the throne, to be in charge, change everything, get rid of the Gentiles, the heathen, and let us be pure again.”

“That’s not the same person I heard on the hillside. He seemed to be more interested in our relationship with God and with one another. I don’t remember him saying anything about the Romans.”

“I tell you he’s coming as the king. He’s going to throw them out. In fact, he’s going to go in and create a fighting force, and he’s going to take out those Romans. Look, they’re starting to get away. I’m going to go follow them. What about you?”

“No, go ahead. Maybe I’ll catch up, but I’ve got to think about this.”

How can it be the same person? The person who told us to love our enemies—is he now going to create a force to kill all our enemies? What do I make of all this. He spoke with such great authority. He told us what it means to be blessed in strange ways. He told us to be light and salt. He told us how to get along with one another, to love one another, even our enemies. He told us how to pray and how to fast, and how we should take care of our relationship with God, and how we should do the will of God. I wonder what’s going to happen. These people with desperate hope—what if he doesn’t do what they think he’s going to do? What will they do to him?

You know, he’s going to stir up Jerusalem. I’m sure of that. It seems they’ve stopped on the hillside and the noise has gotten quieter. I wonder what’s going on. I wonder if I should follow and become part of that force. Years ago in Galilee I thought about becoming one of the Zealots. That was ten years ago. But all those guys that went that direction, I think they’re mostly dead now. Nobody joined. Nobody listened. Should I listen to this king that rides a donkey? His teaching is challenging. He talks about trusting God and worshiping God and focusing there, and out of that, learning to care for one another and even love our enemies.

I remember now, he talks about how we must decide what master we might serve. He asked us what master we do serve. He said there are two ways: there’s a gate that’s broad and open and there’s a gate that’s narrow. He said that the way through the broad gate is easy. The road is broad and easy, and yet it leads to destruction, he said. The way through the narrow gate is what he offers; a road to life.

Running after the crowd and wanting to be part of that force, is that that broad road? Or can I learn from what he taught on that hillside. What force do I believe in? Do I take up the sword? What about the force of love? What do I do? What’s this week going to bring? What would you do?

What do you do? Amen.