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These palms remind me of a day long ago, a time when I was in the right place at the right time. Have you ever had the experience of being in the right place at the right time? When something amazing occurs just because you happen to be there? I hadn't planned anything special on that day when Jesus came into town. I was going about my business, taking care of my donkeys, feeding them, and cleaning out the stable. I had my back turned away from my donkeys for a short period of time, and when I looked around, two men were untying my donkey! I asked, "What are you doing?"

One man replied, "Jesus needs it." I had heard of the man Jesus, for he had been teaching around the area for a few years. They explained that he was coming into town and wanted to process in on a donkey. I thought to myself, "That's quite a political statement, for it echoed the time when King Solomon a thousand years before rode to his coronation on a donkey that belonged to his father, King David.<sup>1</sup> Was Jesus trying to hint that he was such a king, as great as our kings David or Solomon? That would be a dangerous statement to make or even hint at, for the Roman political leaders would not like any challengers to their power. They often displayed their might as they rode into town on war horses,

proudly displaying their military power. Anyone who tried to challenge their rule would disappear.

We had longed for a strong Messiah to enter our world and set things right by defeating those in power and ruling with peace and justice. I began to wonder if maybe that's what Jesus was trying to indicate by riding a donkey, though from what I had heard about him, he seemed to have a gentle nature. I heard he had healed people—even on the Sabbath, which upset our religious leaders as they accused him of working on our holy day. He ate with outcasts and sinners, those people who were often overlooked. He seemed much more interested in ordinary people than our religious or political leaders did, for the ones in charge only seemed to care about maintaining their power.

I blurted out to those two men, "I've heard about Jesus, and I would be honored to let him borrow my donkey." Looking back, I can see that maybe I set him up for failure, for things did not turn out the way I had anticipated. I thought maybe he would have an army behind him, a powerful group of men who would challenge the leaders of our city. Agreeing to help with this procession by offering my donkey might be what led him to get killed, but I'm getting ahead of my story.

I decided to follow those two disciples of Jesus, and as I watched Jesus climb on my donkey, I recalled a verse from the prophet Zechariah who envisioned a time when a king would ride into town on a donkey.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.<sup>2</sup>

Funny story: How many donkeys are mentioned in this poem? Two? How many donkeys did Jesus ride? Matthew suggested he rode two, but can you imagine how awkward it would be to ride two donkeys at once? Hebrew poetry often used repeating phrases to emphasize its point:

humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey

When Matthew read the poem from Zechariah and wrote his story about Jesus, Matthew misunderstood the poetic imagery and thought that Jesus literally rode two donkeys into town. The other three gospel writers mentioned only one donkey, which is all that the disciples asked to borrow from me.

As I followed the procession of people into town, some began spreading their coats on the ground before Jesus, and that reminded me of what happened when King Jehu was secretly anointed as king thousands of years ago. The prophet Elijah asked his student to go and anoint Jehu's head with oil and proclaim him as the next king.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, when Jesus entered town, some crowd members spread on the road palm branches, symbolizing victory. What victory did Jesus or the crowd have in mind?

Plus, the crowd shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

I was concerned that if the religious or political leaders saw Jesus on the donkey, the coats on the ground, the palm branches, and heard the crowd proclaiming Jesus as the Son of David, that they would understand the imagery and feel threatened.

Nothing immediately happened, and I was relieved when they returned my donkey and no one was hurt, but later Jesus chased out all those who were selling items in the temple, and he overturned the table of those who exchanged money. What a way to make a statement and

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get yourself noticed! I knew things would not go well for Jesus, and I wondered if I could have prevented this reckless behavior if I had refused to let him use my donkey. Without my donkey, maybe there would have been no parade and he wouldn't have felt encouraged to make such a public display.

I'm ashamed to say that I distanced myself from what happened the rest of that week. The authorities eventually caught up with Jesus and executed him like a common criminal. I knew he didn't deserve such a death, and I have always felt a bit guilty that I went along with the whole series of events. If only I hadn't let those disciples take my donkey. What might have happened?

I later learned a prayer that Jesus had taught his disciples—one that asked for daily bread and asked for forgiveness. Jesus's prayer ended with "Lead us, away from temptations, and deliver us from evil." Years later the church added a doxology at the end, words of praise—"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

Even though we didn't get the kind of kingdom that we expected from Jesus, and he didn't use power to destroy existing systems, many continue to offer words of glory, to offer praise and to honor Jesus. From the looks of those gathered here, you continue to honor Jesus too.

Maybe that's why the church added those words at the end of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples—to remind us that even when we don't get what we're expecting, something wonderful still can happen. We pledge allegiance to God's kingdom and trust in the gentle power of Jesus. In doing so, surprising and amazing things can happen in our lives and we can still offer glory. You might already know what happened on the third day after the death of Jesus, but that's a story for another week. Stay tuned in, for no matter how bad life gets, new life is on the horizon.

Praise God. Hosanna in the highest!

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 1:33-44

<sup>2</sup> Zech. 9:9-10.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings 9:13 (See [www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/04/jehu-on-a-donkey](http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/04/jehu-on-a-donkey))