



# Blessed Are The Meek

SCRIPTURE:  
Matthew 5:2-5  
Matthew 21:1-11

March 28, 2021 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

**W**ell, it's Palm Sunday. Parade day. The day the ordinary folks were filled with hope that the occupying power of Rome might be pushed out. King Jesus comes riding into the holy city and hopes are running high.

Some scholars tell us that what we see here is a bit of street theatre. Marcus Borg, a frequent visiting scholar here at Village, believes that in this parade, Jesus provides a contrast to the parades of the Roman military that occurred in Jerusalem.

Borg describes the Roman parade this way: "A [display] of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather, armor, helmets, weapons, banners, gold eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. [The sounds] of marching feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."<sup>1</sup>

Sounds as if Borg has uncovered some old YouTube footage of a Roman parade. Jesus' parade was an obvious contrast to such a display of power. There was singing and children were in the crowds. Palm branches were tossed on the ground to make a pathway.

Matthew adds a bit of Biblical interpretation to the story—to make sure we get to the truth of this parade. Matthew quotes a few verses from the prophet Zechariah:

Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you  
Triumphant and victorious is he  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey  
And on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

They all knew that passage. So, they also knew that Matthew had edited the passage. He left something out. Some might say he left the most important part out:

Look your king is coming to you...

Triumphant and victorious is he

Humble, and mounted on a donkey...

But Matthew left out the second line: *triumphant and victorious*. He left that out. Because this is no parade to demonstrate who's in charge.

This a parade of humility. Sounds funny—a parade of humility, but it is. And if I understand the text, humility doesn't simply describe the manner in which Jesus enters the city; humility describes the reason Jesus enters the city.

We have been reflecting on the Beatitudes this Lent. And if there is a Beatitude that I would associate with Palm Sunday, it is "blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth." To be meek and to be humble are not exactly the same, but they are cousins in the family of human orientations. Why does Jesus say this is blessed?

I say meekness and humility are cousins, if you will, because I think both states of being are not realities that we pursue head on. I think they result from how we see others.

I have known some people who lived this Beatitude. I'm thinking of Helen Hogan. Some of you will remember her. She and Lavergne Friday owned the organ bench at Village for decades. When I came to Village, Helen was still playing the piano, accompanying the children's choirs. She delighted in the little ones.

It was my first Christmas Eve at Village. The children's pageant was taking place and this sanctuary

1 Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week* (2006), p. 3.

was filled and most laps contained a child or two.

We were right in the middle of the pageant. Helen, who was seated at the piano, got up and walked across the chancel to me. I thought something was amiss.

She sat next to me while the children were reciting their lines... “and in that region, there were shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night.”

She said to me, “Do you see this sanctuary?”

“Do I what?”

“Do you see these people? Isn’t it just wonderful?”

I didn’t realize it at the time, but she was like Emily in Thornton Wilder’s play, *Our Town*. “Do you see these people?” she asked. It’s a good question. What does it take to really see people?

In *Our Town*, Emily dies in childbirth. She joins the saints who, for the purposes of the play, are together in the cemetery of Grover’s Corners. From this perspective, she looks back at her life, and it pains her, because from the vantage point of the beyond, she realizes how seldom we see people as people. We are so distracted.

Emily says, “Let’s really look at one another! ... [Life] goes so fast. We don’t have time to look at one another. I didn’t realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed... Wait! One more look. Good-bye. Good-bye, world. Good-bye, Grover’s Corners... Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking... and Mama’s sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you are too wonderful for anybody to realize you.”

And then Emily asks, “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?” The stage manager responds, “No, saints and poets maybe, they do some.”

Saints and poets and the meek like Helen Hogan. Helen said, “Tom, do you see these people?” I hadn’t really been paying attention. I was too busy leading

worship. Do you hear how crazy that sounds? But Helen prompted me, so I looked, and Helen was right. It was wonderful.

Seeing people isn’t easy. Every day now, we are learning of new vicious attacks on Asian Americans. There’s a lot of hatred in this country and a lot of arrogance. But what we are really witnessing is the consequences of blindness. It’s hard to really see someone as a child of God and still shoot them, or strike, or curse them. It’s astonishing how many are boasting of their spiritual blindness.

It’s the opposite of this Beatitude. I think the meek see people. Even more specifically, when they see people, they know they are looking at something wonderful. They know they are seeing the crown of creation, the handiwork of God, a precious unrepeatable gift. They see the good in people and it brings them delight.

That’s why Jesus rides into Jerusalem... because he saw the people. He saw the mothers there who were holding their babies. He saw the men with their dusty feet and their weary souls. He saw the poor and those who were sick. He saw those who came to the parade without eating that day because there was no food. He saw those who were so busy just trying to do what needed to be done. He saw them all and he loved them and that’s why he rides into the city. He had to come. He just had to come. He knew what was happening and he didn’t have long now. But he had to come because he really saw them and knew they were wonderful.

If Borg is right and there were military parades, the point of those parades was to say: Hey, look at us. Be impressed with us. We are running things now.

Jesus’ parade was different. He was there to say: I see you. I really see you. I see you and it is wonderful. It is a blessing. Such meekness, such humility, scared some folks to death. But Jesus knew it was the only way to save the world.