



## "FEAR NOT, OH DAUGHTERS" – JOHN 12:12-16 (ESV)

### *Palm Sunday*

*By: Reverend Mabogany S. Thomas*

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I entered this world as a daughter.  
I inherited this identity by birth.  
My mother's womb is always embedded into my identity.

As time progresses, identities become more intersectional, but I will always be a daughter. And yet, the question becomes, what happens when society questions the merit of your inherited identity? What happens when society declares it as "not enough"? I entered this world in proximity to another, through the body of mother, and I will always be a daughter.

The status of daughter is always defined by one's proximity to another person's merit. Biblically, a daughter never appears to stand alone in her power. She is always defined in proximity to someone else's merit. She is a daughter who then becomes a wife, a property agreement whose function is to bear sons to carry out one's legacy. Occasionally, we encounter biblical stories where daughters become judges and prophetess, free slaves and women with agency. But more often than not, the identity of daughter is not afforded this mobility of independence.

Yet our text today positions a Savior who enters Jerusalem, whose very embodiment twists the narrative of merit and identity. Jesus —the brown-skinned Palestinian Jew born to a teenage mother, raised by a carpenter, whose identity, too, was never enough for those in power— makes an entrance as a claim on identity. The text proclaims that the crowd begins to describe Jesus as King, in the fulfillment of the prophetic vision. But Greco-Roman society never honors him as such.

For the story goes that it is only after Jesus is known to be coming into Jerusalem that we begin to see people making a scene. The crowd emerges. People have something to say. They fill the streets. They bring branches from palm trees. Quickly, the crowd makes their journey to witness Jesus.

As the crowd draws near, they become the unofficial welcoming parade into Jerusalem. You can hear them shout 'Hosanna' along Jesus' entry. The crowd cries out in shouts of 'Hosanna' as they proclaim, "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*" The crowd proclaims Jesus as King.

Yet even amidst the fanfare, Jesus pays little attention to the crowd. He takes a young donkey, sits on it, and begins his summit, just as the prophecy declares. Except, even those closest to Jesus do not understand what they see. Those closest to Jesus are unsure of his actions. It is not until they hear the crowd and witness the glorification of Jesus that they remember the prophecy as proclaimed by Zechariah.

The disciples do not understand what is happening around them, until they experience the crowd. For these are the words of the prophecy, "*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.*" Divinity is made clear in the experiences of the disciples, however, even then, the experience is not about the crowd. The crowd is not central to the story, even as the voices of the crowd appear the loudest.

Certainly, the shouts of 'Hosanna' that come from the crowd have meaning and intention, but these momentary cries are not the embodiment of the prophetic. The crowd is the vehicle through which the disciples understand the moment, but the cries themselves are not the focus of the moment. Perhaps more than anything, beloved, the focus of this moment is about Jesus' proximity to identity and those he chooses to draw nearer.

The written relationship between Jesus and the daughters of Zion in the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy makes a claim about whose identity matters before God. The reference to fear is held in tandem to the daughter of Zion. The prophecy from Zechariah declares, "*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.*"

Therefore, the one who comes to heal and save, protect and deliver, provide and create in the person of Jesus is held in proximity to the daughters—the literal daughters, metaphorical daughters—Jesus' identity is not solely in the triumphant entry but in his embodiment of those he seeks to see. His identity always unfolds in proximity to the daughters.

Yet the poetic reference to Zechariah's words suggest that 'daughter of Zion' is a collective reference. "*Fear not, daughter of Zion,*" signifies not one margin of society but includes all people who have been cast aside and who find themselves and their identities, always, at the bottom. Because remember, this is what we know biblically about the status of daughters: the status of daughters is always known in proximity to others.

Who is their father? Who do they marry? Whose lineage are they connected to? Are they clean or unclean? Are they known or unknown? Daughters have always been at the bottom of the totem

pole. And yet, the Savior comes in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, saying "*Fear not, daughter of Zion*" in his very being. In this triumphant entry, to the very crowd who will betray him, the Gospel account displays Jesus embodying, *living*, Zechariah's poetry.

This entrance is not about the crowd but about all those invisible to the crowd. The focus here, beloved, is not for those who cry out 'Hosanna' and celebrate the Savior's coming at the beginning of the week. The focus shifts to those who live lives that continuously beg for a God who is with them, to rescue them, because society says they will never be enough. The focus is for those who call for 'Hosanna' not merely in *a* moment but in *all* moments, from the depths of their being.

"*Fear not, daughter of Zion,*" includes us whether or not we ever make it to the crowd. This is how I know it includes us whether we are visible or not. Because don't we as people know what it means to live with our backs against the walls? Don't we know what it means to live a life of 'Hosanna'? Don't we know what it means to call out for that which is beyond us from day-to-day, for the One who is our lifeline?

Jesus' entrance is for those who **live out** a cry to 'Hosanna' authentically, not momentarily, because they are never given a chance to be recognized. It is about those who have genuinely cried out from the depths of their being for a Savior, not just in a moment of celebration.

It is not about those who gather because they speculate Jesus is coming. It is about those who know they need a Jesus who is coming. It is about those who desire to be more like Jesus and those who fear that they will never be enough in a society that constantly overshadows them.

The Savior comes riding on a donkey to say, "*Fear not, oh daughters.*" Not for the disciples. Not for the crowd. Not for the fanfare. Not to be known or amplified. Jesus comes by way of a donkey to say, "*I see you. I know you live in fear. I know the crowd seeks to erase you, but I am here for you.*" Jesus arrives on behalf of the margins of society. "*Fear not, oh daughters,*" Jesus says in his entry, "*Fear not.*"

So, I need you to understand today that Jesus does not enter into Jerusalem for the ones with status or privilege. Nor does Jesus enter into Jerusalem on this day for the crowd or the celebration. This brown-skinned Palestinian Jew named Jesus of Nazareth enters into Jerusalem on *this* day for those who got lost in the crowd and for the ones whom the crowd deems unworthy.

Jesus enters the story for those of us who live in fear—fear of never being enough. This is why, even while the crowd yells 'Save Us, Save Us,' Jesus' response is not to those who shout now in celebration for temporary relief but for the least of these, that may not even be able to shout—unto them, Jesus responds that you do not have to be afraid.

"*Fear not,*" Jesus says, "*For the one who sees you, knows you and won't miss you is of you and is here.*"

*"Fear not," Jesus says, "For the one who is betrayed, continues to stand with you."*

*"Fear not," Jesus says, "Fear not."*

Jesus speaks in his embodiment, in his way of being, on a donkey. He speaks to those whose identities have been subdued. He speaks to those known *only* in proximity to someone else's status. Jesus arrives on our behalf which is the good news for us today, beloved.

The good news is that Jesus chose a donkey to make this entrance because he knows you. He chose a donkey because he heard you. He chose a donkey because of his embodiment within you. In the same way that the womb is forever bound up with the identity of daughter, Christ is forever bound up with each and every one of us. Christ is bound in you.

So, I say this to you, *"One who has been forgotten, that Christ comes by way of you."*

And I say this to you today, *"One who has been cast aside, that Christ comes by way of you."*

I say this to you, especially you, *"One who has been silenced, that Christ comes by way of you."*

So, fear not, beloved, fear not. Even if you are not in the crowd, do not fear because the Jesus we know and love, the One in whom we believe in, calls out to you, to us, from beyond the crowd. He sees us and comes to us by way of a donkey entering Jerusalem, just for us.

And all along the way, Jesus' very being declares, *"Fear not, oh daughters, for I am with you. I see you. I know you. You are mine."*

This is the Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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